



# Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia

An Illustrated Dictionary

Jeremy Black and Anthony Green

Illustrations by Tessa Richards

OBSCURUM

Published by British Museum Press  
for the Trustees of the British Museum

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*Foreword:* A single winged goddess on a large-scale tablet (see plates) is left uncut. The date provided may be an understated aspect of this famous Old Babylonian or Neo-Assyrian Period (c. 1800).

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Published by British Museum Press  
A division of British Museum Publications Ltd  
40, Monmouth Street, London WC2R 6JH

**British Library Contribution to Publication Data:**  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0 7043 0714 4

Designed by James Straker

Typeset in Garamond and printed in Great Britain by  
The Book Press, New

## **Authors' note**

The names and concepts of Mesopotamian religion are recorded in two languages, Sumerian and Akkadian. Where possible, words have been listed in this dictionary in their Sumerian form, with only a cross-reference under the Akkadian name. Thus the goddess Inan (Akkadian), for instance, is dealt with under her Sumerian name Inanna. However, within the entries, the Sumerian or Akkadian name is used as appropriate, depending on the sources or periods referred to. A number of Mesopotamian names are commonly used in modern books (including this one) in Greek or Latin forms (especially place-names, e.g. Kish) or Hebrew (for Akkadian *šarru*), as in a form in which they were in the Authorized Version of the Bible. Terms used especially the names of Assyrian kings, e.g. Sennacherib (for Akkadian *Šin-šar-ēšir*). Similarly, archaeological sites are sometimes known by their modern Arabic names, e.g. Nineveh (for Sumerian *Īdīna*).

Of course we have no exact information on the pronunciation of the Akkadian or Sumerian languages, but scholars have reconstructed an approximate system based on comparisons with related Semitic languages and on a few cuneiform words. Greek, a standard guide to this is as follows:

The long vowels *a* and *i* are always pronounced as in Italian (i.e. as 'ah', 'ay', 'ee', 'oi').

The signs 'u' or 'i' over vowels mark them as long.

The letter *g* is always hard, as in 'golf', not soft, as in 'genre'.

The symbol *š* indicates the sound *sh*, as in 'shop'.

The symbol *ḡ* in Sumerian words indicates the sound *gh*, as in 'sing'.

The letters *q*, *ḡ* and *q* indicate 'emphatic' forms of the consonants *k*, *g* and *h* (and can be pronounced as *q*, *g* and *k*).

The letter *h* always indicates the guttural sound *ch*, as in 'loch'. This means that *ah* indicates two words – *ah* followed by guttural *h* – but just *ah*.

Words beginning with *h* are listed separately after those beginning with *s*.

Because our understanding both of the cuneiform writing system and of the languages remains so far from complete, occasionally some of the Assyriology (in this study has come to be known, ancient names sometimes

appear written differently in early publications. For instance, we now know that in the name of the god Ninurta, the sign IB should be read as UR TA, but in older books 'Ninib' will be found. This corresponds to the same group of signs in Sumerian, but is now out of date as a transcription. The books in the reading list on pages 191–2 all use the transcriptions currently favoured by the majority of scholars.

Illustrations have been chosen to accompany many of the entries in this book. Drawings are particularly useful to show iconographic details or scenes, or the occasional relatively simple object. Most have been drawn by Tessa Rickards especially for this work. In other cases photographs have been preferred in order to give a clearer picture of the objects themselves. Although each of these illustrations has been selected with a particular theme in mind, they often contain elements which illustrate aspects covered in other entries. Therefore, each illustration has been numbered in sequence and the numbers of any that are relevant are printed in the margins of the text. Visual representations of some of the supernatural beings and the major symbols of the gods in art are given in illustrations 53 and 76.

## Introduction

Ancient Mesopotamia was the home of some of the world's earliest cities, and the place where writing was invented. For these two major developments alone – urban society and literate society – it might justly be titled the 'cradle of civilisation', but in its literature, its religious philosophies and no less in its art it can also be placed firmly as the direct ancestor of the Western world.

Our knowledge of the civilisation of ancient Mesopotamia is constantly expanding. A hundred and fifty years after the first modern excavations, archaeological work in the Near East continues unabated and new discoveries are constantly being made which add to, reshape and refine our assessments of some of the most staggering human achievements of antiquity. At the sites of ancient settlements and in the museums of Iraq and of other countries one can contemplate and wonder at the monuments, arts, handicrafts and utensils of daily life of the Mesopotamians. Thanks to the Mesopotamians' own greatest invention – writing – and modern decipher-

1 Worshippers stare wide-eyed at the heavens. Limestone statues found with numerous others buried in a shrine of an Early Dynastic temple at Ešnunna (modern Tell Asmar). The eyeballs are of inlaid shell. Ht. of each statue 0.34 m.



2 (below) A typical ancient mound (or tell) site of southern Mesopotamia. A view of Eridu.

3 (right) Cuneiform (wedge-shaped) writing. The names and titles of Hammurabi, king of Babylon in the early second millennium BC, from the stone monument inscribed with his Laws.



ment of the languages in which they expressed themselves, we can read their literature, reconstruct their history and learn something of their thoughts.

This is not to say that vast amounts of research do not still remain to be done. If some areas of history can be reconstructed down to the smallest detail, there are periods where enormous gaps in our knowledge remain. If numerous copies survive of one poem, there are many others of which only fragments have been recovered. If we can trace the use and meaning of some religious motifs throughout thousands of years, there remain some whose significance still eludes us completely. There is a constant need for skilled archaeologists and scholarly researchers to sift through the great wealth of evidence coming to light. But for the general reader, several reliable accounts of Mesopotamian civilisation, together with the story of how it has been revealed to us, are now available (see pages 190–2). There are lavishly illustrated books showing the full range of ancient art, from temple architecture and palace reliefs to cylinder seals and filigree jewellery. And gradually, accurate and readable modern translations of the extensive Sumerian and Babylonian literatures are appearing, together with explanatory studies.

This book does not attempt to emulate the breadth or detail of such works, but rather to serve as an introductory guidebook for those who are tempted to read for the first time about ancient Mesopotamia, and especially to those

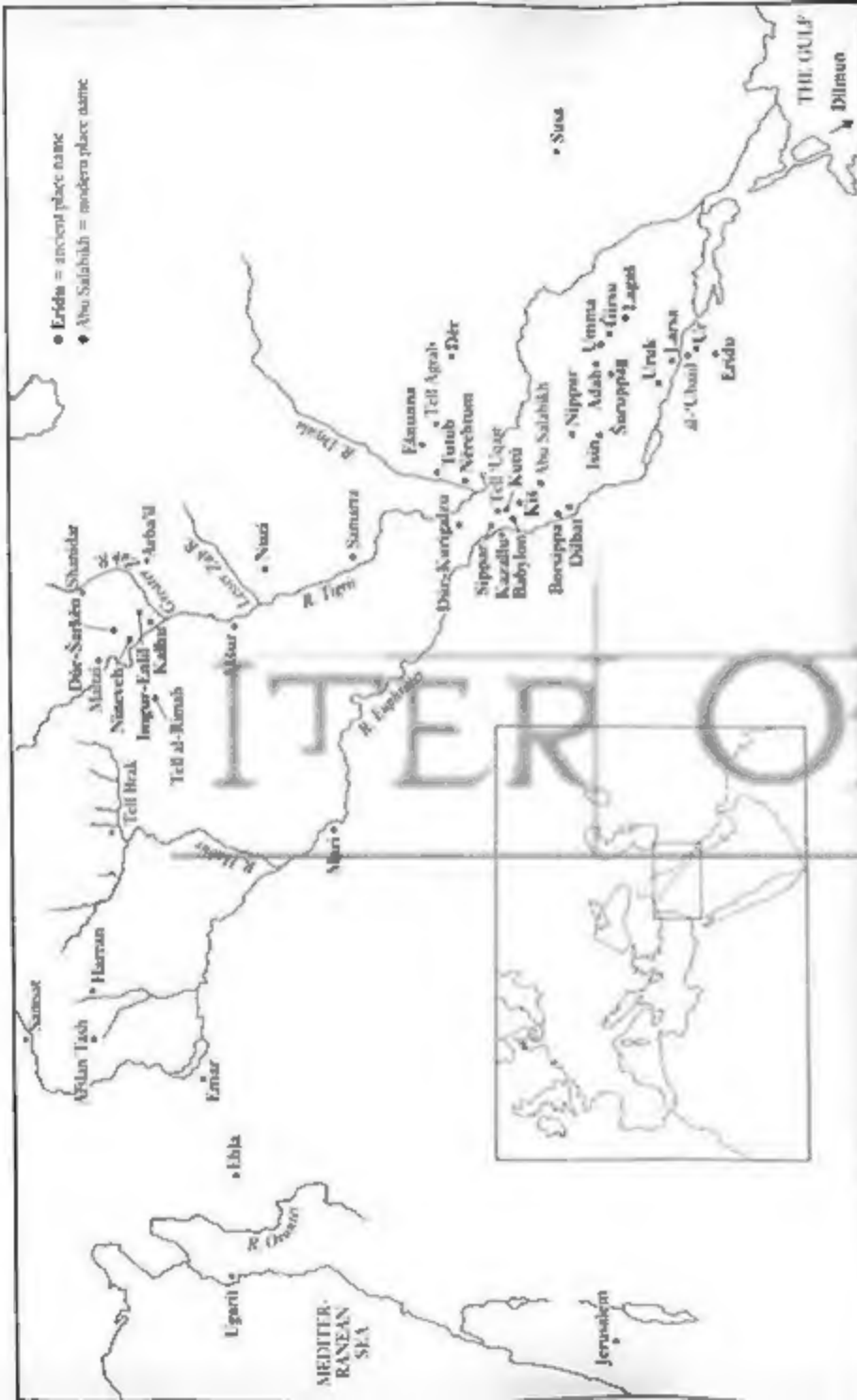
whose interest is drawn to the belief systems of ancient peoples as revealed in their art and in their writings. It is not intended to be a complete survey of religion and beliefs, and necessarily reflects the particular interests of the authors. There are a number of extended essays, which are complemented by shorter entries covering the most interesting individual deities, motifs and symbols, and a selection of other topics. Inevitably much has been omitted.

The uses to which cuneiform writing was put in Mesopotamia have ensured that, in addition to administrative, commercial and historical documents, extensive attention was paid to the recording of religious matters. In pre-modern societies, religion had a much more pervasive influence on every aspect of life: government and politics, social relations, education and literature were all dominated by it. Thus in this context we subsume under the term religion a wide sweep of ideas and beliefs ranging from magic at one extreme to philosophy at the other. A very considerable portion of ancient art, too, was produced within this broad religious sphere, or using motifs and images derived from religious traditions. The gods, goddesses and demons, the motifs, symbols and religious beliefs of the several thousand years of Mesopotamian civilisation are bewilderingly complex to the modern reader who stands on the threshold of that world. The authors hope that this dictionary can be used as a first reference book to accompany them on their journey within.

## Peoples and places

The cultures of Mesopotamia grew up through the interplay, clash and fusion of different peoples, with their separate social systems, religious beliefs and pantheons, languages and political structures. Uniquely, Mesopotamia was a crossroads and melting-pot for vastly different groups of peoples over thousands of years from the prehistoric periods to the Persian conquest. Moreover, although the potential productivity and prosperity of the region was the impetus for extensive and prolonged immigration, the area has no real geographical unity, nor any obvious or permanent capital, so that it is in marked contrast to civilisations of greater uniformity, such as Egypt. There are, however, a few unifying factors, such as the cuneiform script for writing, the pantheon of gods which through syncretism and assimilation was an evolving tradition, and the highly conservative works of art, especially religious art. In these fields, at least, it is therefore possible to speak of something uniquely 'Mesopotamian'.

The map on page 10 shows the ancient Near East. Mesopotamia – 'the land between two rivers' – was a name given first by the Greeks to the exceptionally fertile river valley of the twin streams Tigris and Euphrates, which both rise in the mountains of Turkey. The Tigris flows faster and deeper, has more



affluents and is more prone to flood than the Euphrates, which follows a more circuitous course until it joins the Tigris in the very south of Iraq and they flow together as the *Shatt al-'Arab* down to the Gulf (of which the shoreline may have been slightly further north in ancient times). More generally, the term Mesopotamia is used to cover the whole extent of the civilisation associated with this region, so that the term effectively includes an area extending outside the borders of modern Iraq into Syria, and parts of Turkey and Iran. At its greatest extent, the influence of Mesopotamian civilisation could be felt as far away as modern Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, Turkey, Cyprus and Greece; there were also commercial connections with the Indus Valley (Pakistan). Mesopotamia proper can be divided into two regions, corresponding to two once-great empires and, later, to two provinces of the Persian Empire. The northern area is Assyria, named after its original capital city Assur; the southern is Babylonia, named after its principal city Babylon: the boundary between the two lay a little north of modern Baghdad. Earlier Babylonia was made up of two regions: a southern area called by modern archaeologists Sumer (anciently *Sumerum*) and a northern half called Akkad, and it is from these two areas that the principal ancient languages of Mesopotamia take their names: Sumerian, an agglutinative, ergative language of which no related language is preserved, and Akkadian, a member of the Semitic family of languages (including also Arabic, Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician and Ugaritic).

The people who invented writing in Sumer in roughly 3400 BC almost certainly spoke Sumerian. They had no traditions of having come to that region from elsewhere and, although the archaeological evidence is not absolutely conclusive, there seems no reason necessarily to assume that they were not the descendants of the earlier, prehistoric peoples of Sumer. Although in time Sumerian spread, as a written language, as far as western Syria, and was widely used as a cultural language throughout Mesopotamian history, its homeland was Sumer, where it was probably spoken as a vernacular until about 2000 BC. None of the other languages related to Sumerian was ever written down and so they remain unknown to us.

The Sumerians, then, were the originators of the early high civilisation of southern Mesopotamia from shortly before 3000 BC. As their language died out as an everyday idiom, they were probably absorbed into the other peoples of the region, who spoke languages of the Semitic family. Scribes with Semitic names are attested in northern Babylonia almost as early as the earliest writing we can read, and they probably spoke Old Akkadian, the earliest recorded form of a Semitic language. Akkadian is used as a general term for this language, of which the later forms Assyrian and Babylonian are also dialects. Other early Semitic languages are Amorite, which we know only from personal names (the Amorites were apparently a largely nomadic

people) and the recently discovered language of Ebla in western Syria, which seems to have been very close to Old Akkadian. Akkadian first came to the fore during the period of the Akkadian kingdom (see below), but it was Assyrian and Babylonian, in their respective areas, which gradually took over as Sumerian died out in the south.

A third ethnic group, the Hurrians, were settled in a wide band across northern Mesopotamia, most of Syria and the very south-east of Turkey by at least 2000 BC. These agricultural people spoke a language of their own, of which the only known relative is the later Urartian; the extent to which they possessed a definable civilisation of their own, as opposed to borrowing their religion and art from their neighbours, is still debated. The climax of their history was the formation of the Hurrian kingdom of Mitanni, which reached its high point around 1400 BC. More than a century later, there still seems to have been a considerable number of Hurrians in Assyria and north-eastern Babylonia, but thereafter they must have been absorbed into the general population.

The names of many tribal and nomadic peoples are mentioned throughout Mesopotamian history, especially the often warlike groups who were either attracted down into the fertile river valleys from the inhospitable Zagros Mountains to the east, or were driven into Mesopotamia by the pressure of

other groups behind them. Such a people were the Gutians, whose entry on the Mesopotamian scene coincided with, if it was not actually responsible for, the decline and fall of the Akkadian kingdom. According to some sources, a series of Gutian leaders ruled southern Mesopotamia until a Sumerian dynasty was eventually able to reassert itself.

A similar story can be told about the Kassites, a people who are first mentioned in Syria in the eighteenth century BC but who moved gradually down into Babylonia and eventually controlled it. A dynasty of Kassite kings ruled Babylonia for half a millennium thereafter. We know very little about the origins of the Kassites, and only a few words of their unclassifiable language and the names of some of their gods: despite their position of political control, they appear to have contributed relatively little to the culture of the lands they ruled.

It was inevitable that the stable, urban cultures of Babylonia and Assyria should be infiltrated by nomadic elements who took advantage of the opportunity to gain material benefit, whether peacefully or by raiding. There is good evidence that both the earliest Assyrians (with their 'kings who lived in tents') and the earliest Babylonians were of Amorite origin. During the second millennium a further wave of Semitic nomads entered history, first as troublesome raiders, then as mercenaries and gradually as settled elements in the population. These were the Aramaeans, who may have developed originally out of one particular Amorite tribal clan. By soon after 1000 BC it is likely that their language, Aramaic, was widely used as an everyday vernacular in both Assyria and Babylonia as well as over most of Syria and Palestine (where Hebrew also was still spoken). The Neo-Babylonian Empire founded in 626 BC may also have had its origins in an Aramaic-speaking tribal confederation, the Chaldaeans. In this way, there was throughout Mesopotamian history a constant interference with the settled, traditional civilisation of the great ancient cities by a variety of groups moving into the area from the mountain fastnesses to the east or the rolling plains to the north-west. These new ethnic and cultural infusions were an important factor in reviving and preserving the long-lived culture which they found in the river valleys.

A great power to the north-west of Mesopotamia was the kingdom of the Hittites, with its capital at Hattusas in central Turkey. This people, who spoke the earliest recorded Indo-European language, had become very powerful at a time when Babylonia was weak, and a Hittite king was able to attack Babylon itself during the seventeenth century BC, although their kingdom never made any serious headway with expansion into the Mesopotamian area, and after 1200 BC was no longer a force to be reckoned with. Similarly the kings of Elam, located in south-west Iran to the east of Babylonia, were able at various times to make forays deep into Babylonian territory, on one occasion carrying away the cult statue of the Babylonian national god,

5 Assyrian scribes recording the events of the king's campaign. One writes with a stylus in cuneiform Akkadian on a clay tablet, the other writes in alphabetic Aramaic, or perhaps makes sketches, on parchment. From a monumental mural painting in the main reception room of the palace at the provincial capital of Kār-Sulmānu-āšarid (Til Barsip) on the Middle Euphrates, reign of King Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 BC) or slightly later.





Marduk. For short periods the Elamites (who spoke a language unrelated to any other surviving language) were able to control parts of Babylonia, even to rule it, and some cultural transfer seems to have taken place: certain aspects of Babylonian magic and religion seem to derive from Elam.

## Mythology and legends

The myths and legends of ancient Mesopotamia form an exceptionally diverse collection of material. Some are preserved in Sumerian and some in Akkadian, the earliest from 2500 BC and the latest from the first century BC. As might be expected from such a broad field, they display very considerable variety, and in many cases there are several different versions of a narrative, originating from different localities or in different periods, some of which directly contradict other versions. Some myths were created within the historical period; others are of indeterminate antiquity. No doubt they were transmitted orally in many forms and on many occasions; however, the only form in which they survive is of course the written form. It is essential to bear in mind that every myth or legend preserved in written form is preserved as part of a (perhaps fragmentary) work of literature which was created in a specific historical environment and which was intended to serve a specific literary aim. In this way they can be compared to the use of Greek myths by



6 The god Ninurta or Adad pursuing a leonine bird-monster, perhaps the Anzû or Asakku. From a cylinder seal of the Neo-Assyrian Period. See ill. 17.

the Greek tragedians, and the same cautions apply. There is no homogeneous system and it makes no sense to talk of the 'character of Mesopotamian myth', except in the most general terms. The very distinction between myth, legend and history is of course a largely modern one.

A particular problem which must also be mentioned is the evident disparity between those literary versions of the myths which happen to survive and the graphic versions of mythical themes used in various heraldic and iconic ways in Mesopotamian fine art. This has been a source of great difficulty in the interpretation of ancient works of art. It serves to emphasise the extraordinary richness of the Mesopotamian heritage, since it seems to imply that many mythical themes used in art refer to narratives of which no written version has yet been recovered.

Most of the Akkadian works incorporating myths and legends which have been studied and edited so far are now available in English translations, but numbers of Sumerian compositions are available only in foreign language editions or in doctoral dissertations (which may not be readily available), or have not yet been published. Apart from these, there are many that have not yet even been read or studied in modern times.

Interest in the Bible has been an important stimulus to modern research in and about the ancient Near East in general. The very diverse collection of prose and poetry, written down over a considerable period of time in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, which makes up the Bible, is the product of a world both alien to that of Mesopotamia and in which nonetheless many echoes of Mesopotamian society, beliefs and history are to be found. This raises the complex question of the existence of various oral traditions throughout the whole Near East, influencing each other. The Mesopotamian evidence happens to be attested in writing at much earlier dates, but this need not lead to the conclusion that it was therefore the origin of all similar themes occurring later on.

## Art and iconography

The interpretation of elements in the religious art of ancient Mesopotamia encounters the difficulty that direct 'captions' (that have been so fundamentally useful in the study of Egyptian and Classical art) are extremely rare and hardly ever straightforward. The following examples may help to illustrate this point. The symbols of the gods shown on Babylonian *kudurrû*-stones (stones recording royal land grants) occasionally have captions identifying the deities symbolised. All the known examples of these had been looted from Babylonia and taken to the Elamite city of Susa, and the labels were perhaps added there for the benefit of the Elamites. Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian figurines of supernatural beings are sometimes inscribed with



7 Symbols carved on a 13th-century BC Babylonian *kudurru*-stone, inscribed with the names of the deities represented. Found at Susa, in south-western Iran, where it had been taken in antiquity as a prize of war.

incantations which name the creature concerned (for example, as *Huwawa*, *Lamashtu* or *Pazuzu*). In the Neo-Assyrian Period, clay figurines of beneficent beings were also often inscribed with magical spells. These do not name the creatures directly, but they are named in ritual texts which give instructions for the figurines' manufacture, the writing to be put on each type and the sites of placement or burial within a building. Furthermore, on stelae and rock reliefs erected by Assyrian kings (or exceptionally governors) to commemorate special events, there is sometimes a one-to-one correlation in both number and order between the gods invoked in the inscription and the symbols depicted. Yet more usually this is not so. For the *kudurrus*, moreover, the gods invoked in the curses of the main text are never those symbolised on the stone.

Sometimes named supernatural beings are described in texts in a way which makes it possible to relate them to extant art. Once again, the Neo-Assyrian rituals concerning the placing of magical figurines, for example, refer to types of creature which can easily be identified even though the figurines of these particular creatures were never inscribed. An example is the Sages (*apkallû*) with the faces of birds, and wings, carrying in their right hands a "purifier" (*multilû*) and in their left a bucket (*bunduddû*), or another set of Sages 'cloaked in the skins of fishes'. Similarly the inscription on one

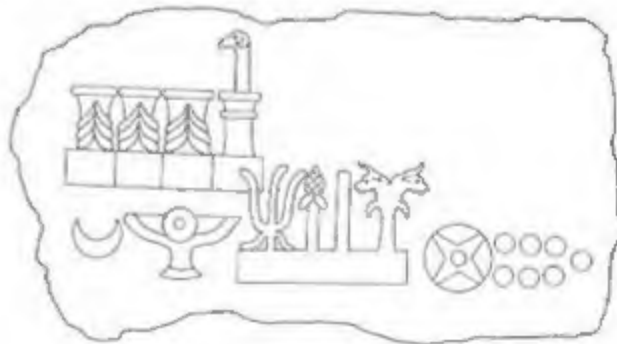
8 (below) The image of the face of the demon *Huwawa* or *Humbaba*, formed from the pattern of animal entrails, as used in divination. Baked clay model, inscribed on the reverse: 'If the entrails look like the face of *Huwawa* ...' Neo-Babylonian, probably 7th-6th centuries BC, from Sippar. Ht. 80 mm.



9 (right) Plaque-figurine of sun-disk-clay, Neo-Assyrian, probably 7th-century BC, found in a brick box buried in the foundations of a building at Altar. The piece depicts the protective and Lahmu (Hair), inscribed on his arms: 'Get out, evil demon!' and 'Come in, good demon!'. Ht. 128 mm.



10 Twelve symbols carved on the Assyrian rock reliefs at Basian (Khinnis) by order of King Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 BC). The accompanying inscription invokes twelve deities in corresponding order, namely Assur, Anu, Enlil, Ea, Sin, Samas, Adad, Marduk, Nabû, Nergal (?), Istar and the Seven.







11 (above) Neo-Assyrian plaque-figurines of the so-called griffin-demon, representing the Seven Sages (*apkallu*) in the guise of birds. Sun-dried clay. Three from a group of seven figurines found together in a brick box buried in the foundations of royal palace of King Adad-nirāri III (reigned 810–783 BC) at Kalhu (modern Nimrud). Hts. 117–140 mm.



12 Neo-Assyrian figurines of the so-called fish-garbed figures, representing the Seven Sages (*apkallu*) in the guise of fish. Sun-dried clay. (left) One of a group of seven figurines found together in a brick box buried in the foundations of the house of a priestly family at Assur, probably dating to the reign of King Sargon II (721–705 BC). (right) One of a group of six (probably originally seven) figurines found together at Nineveh and possibly belonging to the reign of King Sennacherib (704–681 BC). Hts. 145, 127 mm.

of the *kudurrū*-stones refers in clear terms to some of the symbols of the gods (though not the ones carved upon it):

... the seat and horned crown of Anu, king of heaven; the walking bird of Enlil, lord of the lands; the ram's head and goat-fish, the sanctuary of great Ea; ... the sickle, water-trough (and) wide boat of Sin; the radiant disc of the great judge Šamaš; the star-symbol of Ištar, the mistress of the lands; the fierce young bull of Adad, son of Anu ...

and so on. On the other hand, written descriptions of works of art and descriptions of supernatural beings in works of literature may be too exceptional or too literary or imprecise to correlate with examples of art.

Glyptic art (for the ancient Near East the term refers to the craft of cutting small seals) provides the most spectacular detail of the religious art of any period, including the association of figures and motifs. On the seals were cut, in miniature and in reverse (for sealing), friezes which involve gods, worshippers, symbols and other motifs, often arranged heraldically or in a form which gives the appearance of a mythological scene. The seals are often inscribed with writing (usually also in reverse) which may give the names of particular deities (as part of a person's name, as the name of the seal owner's personal god or within a prayer of incantation). Occasionally it is clear that the deities so named correspond to those depicted. More usually, however, it is not so. Some scholars have argued that while on an individual seal the deity shown may not be the one mentioned, nevertheless in any given period there will be a rough correlation on seals in general between the deities most often depicted and those whose names are most frequently given. However,



13 Design of an Old Babylonian cylinder seal from Larsa, depicting the underworld god Nergal, holding his distinctive scimitar and the double lion-headed standard. The inscription is a dedication to Nergal by Abisarc, perhaps the king of Larsa of that name.



14 Examples of Mesopotamian glyptic art: (*above*) grey haematite cylinder seal (Ht. 21 mm) of the Old Babylonian Period from Nerebrum (modern Ischali), with modern rolling; (*middle*) clay tablet of the Old Babylonian Period from Sippar, with impressions from the rollings of a cylinder seal (of Ht. 2.24 mm); (*below*) blue chalcidony conical stamp seal (Ht. 21 mm) of Neo-Babylonian date, with modern impressions (place of discovery unknown).

the identifications so far suggested appear on other grounds improbable. It may be that the mention of some gods was sometimes an *alternative* to their depiction and that certain gods were known more for their personalities and deeds than for their pictorial forms.

A much-used method has attempted to relate scenes on seals, especially of the Akkadian Period, to later mythology (on the assumption that the scenes reflect earlier, perhaps orally transmitted, versions of the later written narratives). Although fairly plausible in itself, the application of this idea to the question of identification is problematic because it has allowed very imprecise correlations of art and literature. In reaction, some have maintained that one-to-one correspondences of named gods and creatures with elements in art do not exist and that a repertoire of stock figures in art was related only in a very general way to the records of gods, demons and heroes in literature. However, this view has itself led to some very wide and subjective interpretations of artistic themes. Enough identifications can now be made from written sources to suggest that, although they may have developed or even changed their meanings from time to time, the figures and motifs of art do attempt to represent specific gods, beings and well-known symbolic objects.

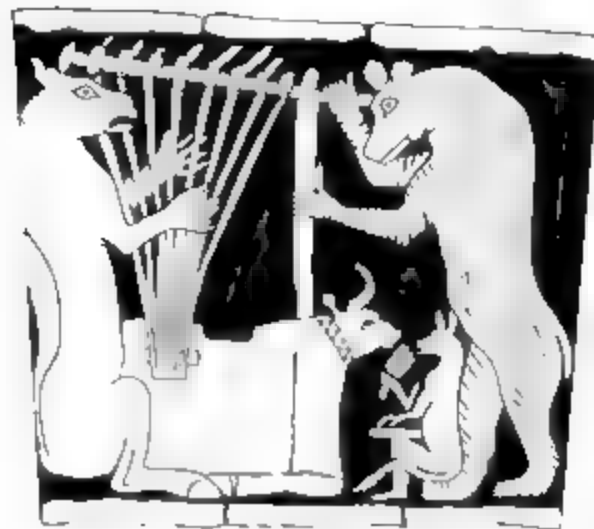
The identification of specific named gods and demons in Mesopotamian art naturally has implications for our appreciations of the mythological narratives themselves.

## Periods

The table on page 22 is intended to give some idea of the chronology of the various political developments and ethnic movements. Writing was invented towards the end of the Late Uruk Period, named after the important city of Uruk in southern Sumer where so much of the monumental architecture of that epoch was excavated. (Uruk is actually the later Akkadian name for Sumerian Unug.) The subsequent series of independent and sometimes warring city-states of Sumer is grouped together as the Early Dynastic Period. This is the period of the earliest literary and religious texts that can effectively be read (for instance the great lists of the names of more than 500 gods and goddesses from the Sumerian town of Šuruppak), so that when the name or cult of a deity is traced back to the Early Dynastic Period, that means in practice to the beginning of written history. Exact dates for these early periods are difficult to calculate, but the Early Dynastic Period (which is sometimes divided into sub-periods for archaeological purposes) is regarded as ending in about 2300 BC, when the first great kingdoms began. Four south Mesopotamian kingdoms follow each other in succession, but the first of these is of special note since, apart from the quite remarkable extent of its rulers' conquests, it was centred on a city of northern Babylonia where a



by now obsolescent. In northern Mesopotamia, the city of Assur remained a minor city-state in a largely Hurrian area until the fourteenth century BC, with one brilliant and brief exception in the reigns of Samši-Adad I (1869–1837 BC) and his son when an 'Old Assyrian' kingdom of enormous proportions suddenly came into being, swept across Syria and was then lost. The collapse of the Old Babylonian kingdom in the south was hastened by the arrival of the Kassites, and their long rule over Babylonia from their capital Dūr-Kurigalzu is termed the Middle Babylonian Period, matched by a Middle Assyrian Period in northern Mesopotamia. The date 1000 BC is then conventionally taken as marking the beginning of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods, although the great days of the most famous Assyrian kings, ruling at successive capitals, Assur, Kalhu (modern Nimrud), Dūr-Sarkeš (modern Khorsabad) and Ninua (Nineveh) – kings such as Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal – came to an end with the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC at a time when the Neo-Babylonian Empire, founded in 626 BC, had barely begun. The Neo-Babylonian dynasty – whose territory reached its greatest extent under Nebuchadnezzar II (reigned 605–562 BC) – ruled until 539 BC. This crucial date in Mesopotamian history, the capture of Babylon by Cyrus, king of the Medes and Persians, marks the first point at which the whole of Mesopotamia was to become part of an empire ruled from outside its own borders. The age of world empires had begun. The Persian or Achaemenid Empire (so called from an eponymous ancestor of Cyrus' family, was swept away in 331 BC by Alexander the Great. The Hellenistic Period which followed is often also called Seleucid after the dynasty initiated by the general of Alexander who gained control of Mesopotamia, Iran, Syria and half of Turkey. His son founded Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in 274 BC. The Parthians, an Iranian people, effectively dominated Babylonia from 126 BC, and their dynasty (sometimes called Arsacid, again after an eponymous ancestor) ruled Mesopotamia until they were dispossessed by another great Iranian dynasty, the Sasanians, in AD 227. The very latest texts written in Akkadian in the cuneiform script – reports of astronomical observations – are dated towards the end of the first century AD, and by this time it is very unlikely that there was more than a handful of people – highly educated intellectuals – who were still in touch with the ancient culture of Mesopotamia and able to understand its languages or read its writing. The beginning of the Christian era marks a convenient, if approximate, date for the extinction of the three-thousand-year Mesopotamian literate tradition.



17 At one time the Sumerians believed that, for the highly privileged, the dismal conditions of life after death could be alleviated by music. A dancing bear, accompanied by animal musicians, is shown in a detail from the sound-box of a lion-headed lyre buried in a tomb of the 'Royal Cemetery' at Ur. Early Dynastic Period.

# ITER O

## abzu (apsû)

Although it can sometimes rain very hard in southern Mesopotamia, it was anciently believed that springs, wells, streams, rivers and lakes drew their water from and were replenished from a freshwater ocean which lay beneath the earth in the *abzu* (*apsû*) or *apûr* (The salt sea, on the other hand, surrounded the earth.) The *abzu* was the particular realm and home of the wise god Enki (Ea), his wife Damgalnuna (Damkina) and his mother Nammu, and was also inhabited by a number of creatures subordinate to him (see Enki's creatures).



19 A clay tablet from the extension bar for the temple of Enki at Uruk, showing a scene with several figures, likely a mythological scene from the Akkadian Period found at Uruk. The fragment is 10 cm. x 12 cm square.



19 The god Ea in the watery *apsû* receives another god, probably Samas, from a cylinder vessel of the Akkadian Period found at Uruk.

Enki was thought to have occupied the *abzu* since before the creation of mankind. According to the Babylonian Epic of Creation, Apsû was the name of a primal creature, the lover of Tiamat, and when Ea killed Apsû, he set up his home on the dead creature's body, whose name was henceforth transferred to Ea's residence. Marduk, as Ea's son, was called 'firstborn son of the *apsû*'. Enki's temple at Eridu was known as E-abzu, 'Abzu temple'.

The underworld was located even further down, beneath the *abzu*. Since in some traditions it was necessary to cross a river (the Huhur) to reach the underworld, the river may sometimes have been identified with the *abzu* (see river of the underworld).

The term *abzu/apsû* was also used to designate a tank for holy water in a temple courtyard.

Adad see Ilkur

## Adapa

According to Babylonian legend, Adapa was the ancient 'wise man' or 'sage' (*apkallu*) of Eridu, the reputed earliest city of Sumer (see Seven Sages). His wisdom and position had been granted him by the god Ea (Enki). Having 'broken the wings' of the south wind, Adapa was summoned for punishment by the supreme god Anu (An). Ea had told Adapa that he would be offered the bread and water of death. Meanwhile, though, the two gatekeepers of heaven, Dumuzi and Ensidra (Ningiszidra), had interceded with An on Adapa's behalf, causing a change of heart. An instead offered the sage the bread and water of eternal life. Adapa refused, thus losing the chance of immortality. The story is often regarded as an explanatory myth of the mortality of man.

See food and drink of the gods.

## afterlife

The ancient Mesopotamians appear generally to have believed that after death most human beings survived in the form of a spirit or ghost which lived in the underworld (see also *gidim*). One of the duties of the living was to



make funerary offerings (of food, drink and oil) to their deceased relatives. A special case is provided by extensive records from Girsu from the Early Dynastic Period of offerings made before the prayer statues of deceased rulers and members of the ruling family: these statues were, it is assumed, originally dedicated by the living to stand in temples and pray constantly for them before the gods. After the death of their donors the statues could not be moved and so came to be the recipients of offerings. However, this does not imply ancestor worship (the living neglected to make *kupa* (funerary offerings), the spirit might wander abroad and return to haunt the upper world).

The conditions of 'life' in the underworld were thought, with few exceptions, to be dismal in the extreme. The Sumerian dead, in dust and scraps and lived in darkness. This is amply documented in the Sumerian poem 'Enkidu and the Nether World' (closely paralleled by part of the twelfth tablet of the Standard Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh), where Gilgamesh asks the ghost (*gidim*) of Enkidu about the underworld. Only still-born children and those who died before their time are envisaged, doubtless as a consolation to parents, as playing at a 'game' and often able and feasting. Otherwise, those with most young children are best off, as having the best chance of receiving funerary offerings. The nature of these grave goods, as recovered from excavations, suggests that the dead could perform at least some of the activities of this life in the hereafter. Those who died and did not receive proper burial were in a sorry state; worst of all was the man who died in a fire, who did not even have a body to be buried. 'His spirit is not in the underworld. His smoke went up to the sky.' Another Sumerian poem, 'The Death of Gilgamesh' suggests that it was expected, after death, that the deceased would present gifts to the denizens of the underworld. There is reference in a poem of the Third Dynasty of Ur, moreover, to different treatments being accorded to individuals in the afterlife dependent upon their condition of burial (see death and funerary practices).

The notion of an underworld peopled by terrifying demonic beings, which foreshadowed the medieval image of Hell, seems to have been a theological invention of the first millennium BC. The dead Enkidu encounters such demons in the Epic of Gilgamesh. The clearest literary account of such an underworld, however, is a text recounting the hellish vision of an Assyrian prince (thought by some to be the seventh-century BC crown prince, later king, Assurbanipal) (see demons and monsters).

See Dugan; galla.

*akita ceremony* see New Year ceremonies.

*alad, aladhamma* see bulls and lions with human head; lama.

*alekhot*

Alcoholic beverages probably resulted from an accidental discovery during the early hunter-gatherer stage of human prehistory. Textually attested for Mesopotamia at a later date are beer and wine, probably including ome, wine. The banquet depicted especially on Sumerian seals and sealings doubtless involved the consumption of the exciting liquors. Medical texts frequently prescribe the use of beer and wine in the making of potions.

That commercialised social drinking, not for religious or medicinal purposes, was common by at least the early second millennium BC is attested by the laws of Hammurabi of Babylon regulating public houses.

No less than man, the gods were susceptible to drink (see food and drink of the gods; lion; Ninmah, Uru). In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the hero Gilgamesh, in search of immortality, meets the barmaid-goddess Siduri. She encourages him to abandon his quest and to enjoy the gifts of life, presumably including the pleasures of alcohol.

See frog; libation.

*alim (lamarbitu)* see bison, bull-man.

*Altar* see Ereshkigal.

*altars*

An altar is an upright standing object at or upon which sacrifice and offering are made, in fact or symbolically. It thereby represents a centre-piece of ritual worship. Prehistoric open-air rituals in Mesopotamia probably employed a natural rock or heap of pebbles or earth, but with the development of temples and shrines, more obvious altars were made of clay, stone or brick. A small shrine of the late fifth millennium BC at Eridu already contained an altar set into a niche opposite the doorway, together with an offering table. This axial placement of the altar remained a constant feature except when its displacement to one side was necessitated by the 'portal' arrangement of 'high temples' (see temples and temple architecture). Usually the altar would be placed, for offering, before the image of the god (see cult statues). In Assyrian temples the altar is occasionally found positioned in front of the statue of the king; in these cases, the king, who was not divine, should be seen as a worshipper before the altar rather than as receiving a cult.

Altars could be relatively plain or could be more elaborately decorated. If the latter, they were set in an architectural style as a room

representing a miniature of the temple itself. At other times scenes of worship or images of protective hybrid figures (demons and monsters) would be depicted on the sides. Rarely these religious designs might be accompanied by apparently secular scenes.

In the Middle Assyrian Period, lead figures (from the temple of Ishtar (Inana) at Assur show scenes of sexual intercourse taking place on top of what looks like an altar (see fertility, prostitution and ritual sex).

From the way some of the symbols of the gods are depicted on the kudurrus and stelae and from designs on seals (especially of the Neo-Babylonian Period) showing a worshipper before an altar, it would seem that emblems, such as the solar disc, horned cap, spade (symbol) 'omega' symbol or wedge, might be placed on the altar to receive worship, or that the altar itself might be placed upon or beside a statue of a deity's animal (see beasts of the gods). Sometimes the statue of a god's animal itself seems to have served as an altar, with a symbol placed upon the animal's back.

*Amasimgal-ana* see Dumuzi.

20 The altar of king Iukhtu-Nusirta I of Assyria (15th century BC) from the temple of the goddess Ishtar in the city of Assur, showing the king approaching, then kneeling in worship, before a similar altar supporting a god's symbol (apparently a giant writing tablet). The altar is dedicated to the god Nusku.

**amulets**

An amulet or talisman is an object — a natural substance or artefact — believed to possess magically protective powers, to bring good fortune or to avert evil (or both). Amulets are carried on the person or placed at the location of the desired magical effect. Usually they are believed to derive their power from a sympathetic magic resting from their connections with nature, from religious associations or from the propitious time of, or the rituals involved in, their creation.

Although the Sumerian and Akkadian languages appear to possess no word for 'amulet', it is clear that a number of objects were used as

- 14 amulets, for instance seals. Objects with an apparently amuletic purpose have often been found in graves (see **death and funerary**
- 21 **practices**).

Neo-Assyrian kings wore a necklace with small metal amulets representing symbols of the gods. In the same period, a small stone or metal head of the god Pazuzu would be worn around the neck of a woman in labour as a protection for her child (from **Lamastu**).

In certain cases, amulets (including seals) seem to have served as extensions of an individual's personality as virtual surrogates for the person.

See **eye and eye-fikels, magic and sorcery**.

**Amurru**: see **Mardu**.

**An (Anu)**

An is the Sumerian word for 'heaven', and is the name of the sky god who is also the prime mover in creation, and the distant, supreme leader of the gods. He is regarded as a descendant of the god Uraš, with whom he was later even identified, or else as the son of primordial Anšar and Kišar. He is father of all the gods. His wife is the earth goddess Uraš, in a later tradition he is married to Ki. As Babylonian Anu, he has a wife Antu. It is An who, in Sumerian tradition, took over heaven when it was separated from earth (*En*), creating the universe as we know it.

In the theory of the three superimposed

heavens, Anu occupies the topmost heaven. The 'way of Anu' is the vertical band of the eastern horizon, between the 'wave' of Enlil and Ea (Eanki), which lie to its north and south respectively.

Although in almost all periods one of the most important of Mesopotamian deities, An's nature was ill-defined and, as he is seldom (if ever) represented in art, his specific iconography and attributes are obscure. He has sometimes been thought to be represented among the gods on the Neo-Assyrian rock-relief at Aklati, but this is uncertain. In Kassite and Neo-Assyrian art at least, Anu's symbol is a

See **Asag; cosmology; Sacred Marriage; zodiac**.

**animals, sacred**: see **beasts of the gods**.

**animal sacrifice**

Sacrifice is a religious rite by which an object, animal or person is offered to a deity in an attempt to establish, maintain or restore a satisfactory relationship of the individual, group or community or the community in general to that god. In many cultures, including ancient Mesopotamia, it has commonly taken the form of the ritual slaughter and offering of animal

In Mesopotamia it was man's duty and the reason for his creation to take care of the material needs of the gods, which included the provision of food (see **food and drink of the gods**). Animal sacrifice, therefore, was regarded as the literal means of satisfying the gods' appetites. Foods were prepared in the temple kitchens and offered to the god's cult statue. In practice, the meat of animal offerings probably remained or became the property of the temple, and was used to feed the clergy and their retainers. The sheep seems to have been the primary animal of such sacrifice, although goats and cattle were also sacrificed. Excavations of rooms in prehistoric and early historic temples, however, have at times uncovered enormous quantities of fish bones, believed to be sacrificial deposits.



ESCUR



21 (above) A gold necklace with amulets in the form of female goddesses and divine symbols such as a crescent, lightning symbol and solar disc. Babylonian c. 19th-18th centuries BC, found at Dhibat 1,430 m. (right) Detail of stone stela of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883-850 BC), found in his royal palace at Kalhu (modern Nimrud). The king, wearing to the symbols of his gods, wears a necklace with similar pendant symbols as amulets.

22 King Assurbanipal of Assyria (reigned 668–627 BC) personally dispatches a bull. Detail of a carved stone monumental wall relief from the king's royal palace at Nineveh.



23 A Sumerian worshipper or priest with sacrificial kid. Early Dynastic Period. From a shell inlay found in the temple of the goddess Ninkharsaga at Mari

A rather different form of animal sacrifice is attested by the animals commonly found in all periods in Mesopotamian and Near Eastern burials (see death and funerary practices). For the most part these probably represented food for the deceased. In Sumerian burials, however, equids and oxen, sometimes harnessed to carts, must have been part of the great ceremonial of the funeral. Possibly their purpose was also to continue their tasks as working animals in the service of the deceased beyond the grave.

The sacrifice of a goat (called 'man-substitute') was used in some rituals to divert sickness or portended evil from individual persons. However, the sacrifice of a sheep during the New Year ceremonies at Babylon is not, as has been suggested, connected with the idea of the scapegoat, an animal sacrificed or killed to bear the sins of the whole people (e.g. Leviticus 16: 8, 20, 21), a concept alien to Mesopotamian thought.

There is occasional evidence of animal sacrifice in connection with building rites. In excavations at Kalhu (modern Nimrud), for example, an animal, perhaps a gazelle, was discovered buried beneath the floor of a royal

building. At Ur, the bones of small birds were occasionally found together with figurines, and clay boxes set into the foundations of a Neo-Assyrian building.

At least in the Neo-Assyrian Period, the ritual hunt seems to have been, in sum, respects, a form of animal sacrifice, since King Assurbanipal (reigned 668–627 BC) is shown on one of his palace reliefs standing beside the slain lions and pouring a libation. Except for these hunting scenes of dying animals, the depiction in Mesopotamian art of sacrificial animals in all their gory detail (so commonly shown in Classical works) is extremely rare.

Sometimes ritual hunting was an element in animal sacrifice, and oblations were conveyed to the gods by one of the fire gods Gibil or Nusku.

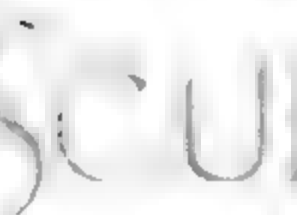
See animal skins, bull and 'winged gate', divination; figurines; human sacrifice; purification, sacrifice and offering.

### animal skins

An interesting deposit has been discovered in excavations at the site of Zawi Chemi Sharadad in northern Mesopotamia, a small settlement dating to the late tenth or early ninth millennium BC. In a heap lying just outside a stone structure were at least fifteen skulls of goats and the articulated wing bones of at least seventeen huge predator birds, vultures, eagles and a bustard. Knife marks on the bird bones indicated that they had been carefully cut from the birds. The archaeologists interpreted these wings as part of ritual costumes. The goat skulls were thought to be part of the paraphernalia of the ritual.

In the Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh*, in mourning for Enkidu, roams the desert clad in animal skins.

Some Neo-Assyrian art seems to depict human figures dressed in animal skins. The figure in a lion's pelt on a palace relief of King



24 Figures dressed in the pelts of lions, perhaps in imitation of the god Ea-saral, from a monumental relief from the palace of the royal Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883–859 BC) at Kalhu (Nimrud)



Tiglath-pileser III (reigned 744-727 BC) may possibly be dressed in imitation of the god Enlil, but it does not appear very likely, given his appearance and context (in a line of human figures, perhaps priests) that this could be the god himself. A pair of such figures, apparently dressed up men, is earlier to be seen on a relief of King Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883-849 BC). Similarly, while figures of the fish-garbed figure may represent the Seven Sages, certain contexts in which we see such figures, for example flanking the bed of a sick man, may suggest that they could sometimes be human figures dressed as the ancient sages. In this case, however, it seems unlikely that the ritual garb consisted of the full skin of an actual fish, reaching from the man's head down to his waist, upper leg or even to the ground, and it has been suggested that cloth costumes were created in precise imitation of a living fish.

#### anointing

The symbolic custom of anointing has its origin in the habit of rubbing the body with fine quality oil (usually sesame oil) for medical or cosmetic purposes. Oil might also be symbolically poured over the head, e.g. of a bride, of persons involved in property transactions, or at the manumission of a slave. Anointed priests (*palissu*) were one particular class of the clergy.

An extension of this custom, from the Old Babylonian Period on, was the duty of anointing the stone inscription or monument of a past king if it were exposed during building work, clearly a substitute for anointing the ruler himself.

In magic and sorcery and medicine (see diseases and medicine) ointments of all sorts were frequently used, prepared both from symbolic (and to us revolting) ingredients and also from genuinely curative herbs and simples.

#### Anšar and Kišar

In Mesopotamian myth, Anšar and Kišar were a pair of primordial, respectively male and female, and perhaps representing the heaven

(An) and earth (Ki). According to the Babylonian Epic of Creation they were the second pair (after Lahmu and Labamu) of offspring of Apsū (abzu) and Tiamat. (An alternative interpretation of the passage makes them the children of Lahmu and Labamu.) Anšar and Kišar in turn bore Anu (An), the supreme god of heaven.

See Aššur

anthropomorphism: see gods and goddesses

Antu: see An

Anu: see An

#### Anuna (Anunnakkū)

The Anuna (Anunnakkū), which possibly means 'princely offspring', is used in earlier especially Sumerian texts as a general word for the gods, in particular the early gods who were born first and were not differentiated with individual names. They are put to work to help build the temple at Uruk in a Sumerian hymn, you are linked with the benign lamu-deities here are the Anuna of Eridu. The sea god Anu (An) is described as king of the Anunnakkū. In the Epic of Creation the multiplicity of gods are called the Anunnakkū of heaven and earth.

Possibly following the use from Middle Babylonian times of the same figure to refer especially to the gods of heaven, the term Anunnakkū came to be used more for the gods of earth (ki) and underworld. Marduk and Damkina (Dumuzidanna), Nergal and Ereshkigal associated with the underworld are said to be powerful among them. There are 400 Anunnakkū of the underworld, but only 300 of heaven, according to one text. This implies the gradual development of a detailed imagery of the underworld.

#### Anunītu

Anunītu (earlier Annunītum) was a Babylonian goddess especially associated with childbirth. Anunītum and Umasium were two aspects of Inanna worshipped at Ugarit. Annunītum was

also worshipped at Sippar. Later, as the name of a constellation, Anunītum referred to the north-eastern part of Pisces.

See Andiax

Anunnakkū: see Anuna

Anu: see Indugud

Apollon: see Adapa; Seven Sages

apotropaic figures: see building sites and deposits, demons and monsters, magic and sorcery

Apur: see Lama

Apur: see Abzu

#### Arabian gods

A number of Arab kingdoms are known to have existed in the Arabian peninsula from at least the first millennium BC. The generic name 'Arab' and a kingdom called 'Arabi' appear in the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings.

Little is known about the religion and paganism of the region before the coming of Islam in the 7th century AD. In northern Arabia the chief deity seems to have been known as Baal or al-Bal meaning 'God'. A number of astral and local deities are well known. At the Arab city of Palmyra, in the 3rd century AD, a triad of gods is attested, headed by Bel (originally Beel, probably equivalent to Baal 'Lord') or Belshamen (Ba'al of the heavens), together with a solar deity Yarhubal or Malakbel and a lunar deity Aqhu.

In the southern Arabian kingdoms the cult seems to have centred around a triad of astral deities. The most important was the moon god, who was usually also the local protector of each individual city, and was therefore referred to under a variety of names, including that of the Babylonian god Sin (Nanna-Suen). Next was the god Aštart, related to the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar (Inanna), the planet Venus. Third in rank was the sun god, usually known as Shamsh, clearly related to the Babylonian name

Šamaš (Utu). The remaining southern Arabian gods known to us are numerous and seem to have had more specific functions, which sometimes gave them their names.

In the sixth and fifth centuries BC there was a cult centre of the moon god at Tayma in north-west Arabia. The Babylonian king Nabonidus (reigned 556-539 BC), a devotee of Sin, spent some twelve years of his reign there away from Babylon (see Nanna-Suen).

In the fifth century BC, the Greek historian Herodotus mentions as the gods of the Arabs (Arabi) and Ailat ('The Goddess'). In the Islamic Qur'an, al-Lat together with al-Uzza and Manat are mentioned as daughters of Allah. They are also attested as divine names in earlier north Arabian inscriptions.

There were also direct borrowings from Mesopotamia and Syria. The pantheon at Palmyra included Nergal (assimilated to the Greek Herakles), Nabu or Nebo (assimilated to Apollo), the Syrian goddess Atargatis, and possibly Ashtar, that is Ishtar (Inanna), and Ischtar (Ishtar).

#### Arrows and underworld

An upright arrow is depicted on Kassite kudurrus as a symbol of the star Sirius (known in Sumerian and Akkadian as 'The Arrow').

25 An arrow. Detail from the carving on a Babylonian kudurrus

Aruru: see mother goddesses and birth goddesses

#### Asag (Asakku)

In the Sumerian poem *Lugale*, the Asag is a monstrous demon who is defeated by the god Ninurta Ningirsu (in another version by Adad (Iskur)). The Asag was hideously repulsive in appearance and his power caused

fish to boil alive in the rivers. He was born from the mating of An and Ki, and the Asag himself mated with the kur (mountains) to produce offspring. He was accompanied by an army of stone allies (the stones of the mountains). On one level the defeat of Ninurta in this myth of the Asag and the stones expresses the unease felt by the inhabitants of the Mesopotamian plain about the inhabitants of the Zagros mountains.

The defeat of Asag by Ninurta may be depicted in relief on the large slabs erected by the ninth-century BC Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II on either side of the main entrance to the temple of Ninurta at Kalhu (modern Nimrud). Here a god carrying thunderbolts attacks a lion-dragon. A related scene is found on Neo-Assyrian seals.

In magical theory the *aug. asabtu* is a demon who attacks and kills human beings, especially by means of head fevers, and who is mentioned in poetical enumerations of diseases.

In another tradition, the Seven (or Eight) *Ukku* are a specific group of demons, the offspring of Anu (An), who are said to have been defeated by Ninktar in a defeat mentioned in the Sumerian poem.

#### Asarlulhi

Originally the god of Kuara, a village near Eridu, Asarlulhi came to be associated with Enki (the god of Eridu), and with magical knowledge, the special preserve of Enki. Asarlulhi was regarded as the son of Enki and Damgalnuna, and when Marduk was also accorded the title of son of Ea (the Akkadian name of Enki) it was natural for Asarlulhi to be absorbed in the personality of Marduk. A hymn of the Old Babylonian Period addresses Asarlulhi as the river of odeal (see river odeal), as the first-born son of Enki and as Marduk. In the Standard Babylonian magical tradition Asarlulhi is used as an alternative name for Marduk in incantations and prayers.

#### assembly of the gods

In a number of Sumerian and Babylonian myths the gods are depicted discussing their

own affairs, or those of mankind, in an assembly (*akku pukrum*) of which An, Anu is the leader and which met at the *ak-lu-akku* in the E-kur. Enlil's temple at Nippur. In some narrative poems, men also debate questions of policy in an assembly of elders or adult men. Probably these both reflect some social reality at the time when the poems were taking shape, whether at national or village level, but it seems impossible to relate this securely to any theoretical reconstruction of the political system of early Sumer.

#### See dreams and visions

#### astrology and astronomy

Strictly speaking, astrology refers to observation of the movements of astral bodies with a view to divination of the future thereby, as opposed to astronomy (disinterested scientific observation). From the movement and appearance of the moon, stars and planets, the Babylonians believed that it was possible to predict future events in the world, especially in the political and military spheres. 'The signs in the sky, just as those on earth, give us signals' the Babylonian view was that portents gave indications - clues - about the gods' intentions. By contrast, Hellenistic (and modern) astrology views the planets themselves as exerting influences over human destinies. It was only from the fifth century BC that Babylonian astrologers began to cast horoscopes to foretell the fortunes of ordinary individuals. However, although many ancient astronomical texts are expressed in a form which allows for their astrological application (for example, they include associations of deities with the constellations where appropriate), the basic facts and procedures are of astronomical or chronological interest, and there is some evidence that the main reason for the development of astronomy was the wish to be able to control the calendar, rather than to interpret celestial events astrologically. Although some deities have connections with stars or planets, many do not, and the idea that Mesopotamian religion was astral in origin is untenable.

#### Babylonian observation of the night skies

can be documented from at least 750 BC in daily records (only a small part of which survive), and by about 400 BC had reached a remarkable accurate level given the pre-Galilean cosmology with which they worked. Lunar eclipses could be predicted with considerable accuracy. Halley's comet was observed and recorded in 47 BC and again in 87 BC. The ziggurats (temple towers) may have been used in the later periods as suitable observation platforms, although that was not their original function. Babylon and Uruk were important centres of astronomy during the fourth to first centuries BC.

In Babylonian astronomy the eastern horizon was divided into three vertical bands, the 'ways' of Enlil, Anu (An) and Ea (Enki), which were used for locating the position of the twelve zodiacal constellations recognised from about 1000 BC. Later these eighteen constellations were assigned singly or in pairs to the twelve months, foreshadowing the later zodiac. Five planets were recognised: Mercury (called 'Jupiter'), Venus, Mars, Jupiter (called the Ferry) and Saturn (called 'Con-

stant'). Many of the names for the constellations were the same as or similar to those transmitted to the modern world by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy (c. AD 150).

#### Asinhabbar see Ninurta-Suen

#### Astrata see Mariu

#### Aškur

Aškur was the god of the Assyrian nation. Originally he may have been the local deity of the city of the same name, or rather - since unusual in Mesopotamia for the god and to bear the same name (see local gods) personification of the city itself. (Oaths were sworn by the name of the city as if it were itself a god). As, therefore, the extent and power of Assyria spread, Aškur became the supreme deity of the emergent state and empire. Details of origins and development of the god, however, are lacking.

Eventually, with the growth of Assyria and the increase in contacts with south-western Mesopotamia, there was a tendency



26 A view of the Assyrian city of Aškur as it appears today. In the foreground is the partly restored Temple of Ishtar; behind are the remains of one of the ziggurats or temple towers.



assimilate Assur to certain of the major deities of the Sumerian and Babylonian pantheons. From about 1300 BC we can trace some attempts to identify him with Sumerian Enlil. This probably represents an effort to cast him as the chief of gods. Enlil was thus regarded as Assur's wife though worshipped in Assyria under the name Mullissu. Then, under Sargon II of Assyria (reigned 721-705 BC) Assur tended to be identified with Anšar the father of Anu (An) in the Babylonian Epic of Creation. The process thus represented Assur as a god of long-standing, present from the creation of the universe. The particular identification may have been suggested by nothing more than the similarity of the names. Under Sargon's successor Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 BC), an attempt was made, at an official level, to reattribute to Assur the

mythology of the Babylonian national god Marduk, as well as the rituals of the New Year ceremonies at Babylon itself. The underlying reasons behind this action were clearly the current political and military struggle between Assyria and Babylonia. This culminated in Sennacherib's nine-month siege, conquest and systematic sacking of Babylon in 689 BC, and his subsequent imposition of direct rule and personal assumption of the Babylonian throne.

Even the emblems of Assur were adopted from Babylonian gods. His animal, the snake-dragon (which even on Sennacherib's rock reliefs at Malta is not exclusive to him) was taken over from Marduk. In collections of symbols of the gods, moreover, Assur seems to be represented by a horned cap, inherited from Anu (An) and Enlil.

The modern attribution to Assur of the solar disc is certainly incorrect. Some scholars, however, believe that the winged disc, very common in Assyrian art and often on Assyrian sculptures with the image of a god above it, and placed over images of battle, *must* and the *shave* *queen* represent Assur. The evidence, however, points strongly to this emblem as a symbol of the sun god Shamash (Utu). Again there may be some borrowing of an image proper to another god.

In spite of (or possibly because of) the tendencies to transfer to him the attributes and mythology of other gods, Assur remains an indistinct deity with no clear character or tradition (or iconography) of his own. It was said to be solely within his power to grant (or to remove) kingship over Assyria, and the Assyrian king was his chief priest and lieutenant on earth. It was particularly common for the names of Assyrian kings to contain the god's name as an element (e.g. Assurnasirpal, Assurbanipal, Esarhaddon (Assur ašhe ṣidin)). The god supported and encouraged the armies of Assyria. The god's seals were used to endorse documents of the utmost political importance, such as King Esarhaddon's (reigned 680-669 BC) treaty providing for the succession (see seals of the gods). In these contexts, however, Assur appears as a mere personifica-

tion of the country, people and power of Assyria as a political entity.

See letters to gods, 'omega' symbol.

Ajra basis: see Ziusura.

August: see divination.

Aya: see Šerida.

Baba: see Bau.

ball-staff

A symbol sometimes called by modern writers a 'ball-staff' or 'ball-and-staff' appears on cylinder seals of the Isin-Larsa Period. It looks like a staff with a large bulge on one side. A motif looking like a pot is almost invariably placed above it. It has been suggested that the 'ball-staff' depicts a type of vessel, balance, rod or loom. Which deity (if any) it represents is unknown.

barley stalk

While possibly antecedents reaching back into the Sumerian Period, the motif of a barley stalk or ear of corn first occurs as a theme after 1800 in the Akkadian Period, and as an independent deity's symbol in Kassite and Mitannian art. It is captioned on one kudurrū as a symbol of the goddess Šala, and is later, in the Hellen-

istic Period, shown as an attribute held by the goddess.

See zodiac.

Basmu: see snakes.

Bau

Bau was a goddess worshipped almost exclusively at Lagash, where she was regarded as the spouse of the god Ningirsu, or else of Zababa. Numerous records survive of the offerings made in the E-tarsusir, her temples at Lagash and Girsu, where oracles were given in early Dynastic times. Bau was a daughter of An, and had two sons by Ningirsu, the deities Ig-alima and Sub-tagana, as well as seven daughters (minor goddesses of Lagash) for whom Ningirsu's paternity was not claimed.

Formerly the goose was thought to be the bird associated with Bau, but this is now known to be erroneous. On Babylonian kudurrū Bau is represented by an object which has been thought to be a winnowing fan.

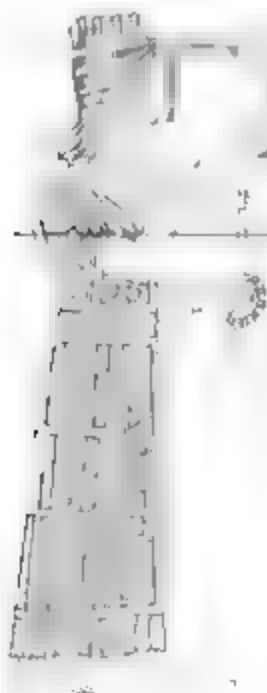
It is possible that the correct form of the name is Bala.

See Kudurrū.

beasts of the gods

As well as her distinctive attributes, weapons and inanimate or avial symbols, many Mesopotamian deities had their familiar beasts,

27 The god Assur from a glazed brick pane found in a private house in Assur with 7th centuries BC

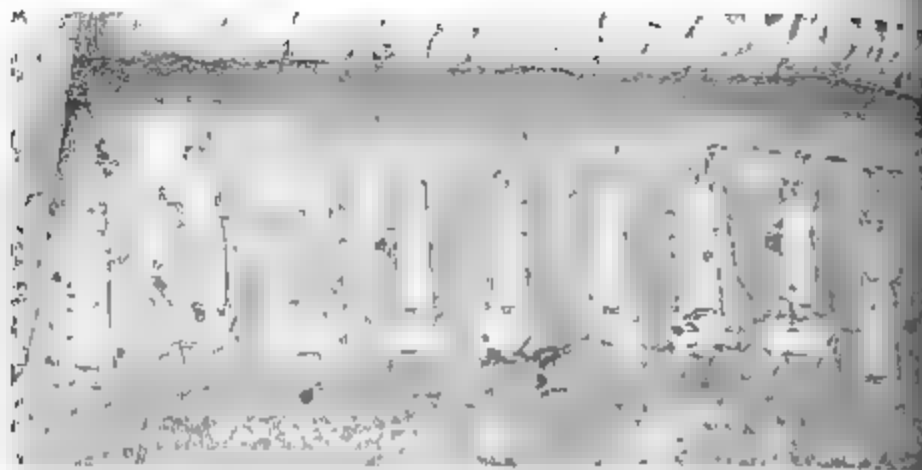


28 The so-called 'ball-staff' with vessel above. Detail from a cylinder seal of the Isin-Larsa Period

29 (centre) A barley stalk or ear of corn, symbol of the goddess Šala. One of the emblems carved on a kudurrū of the Kassite Period

30 (far right) A god walking his human-headed lion. Detail from a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period





41 The best preserved of four similar panels of rock reliefs at Malta, carved on the cliff face on the south-east side. The relief shows in the road leading from Assyria to the Upper Zab valley. The Assyrian king, probably Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 BC), flanked a procession of seven deities on their animals, probably (left to right) Adur on snake-dragon and Enlil on eagle, Ishtar on lion, Shamash on goat, Ninurta on bull, and Ishtar on lion-dragon.

the lion-dragon, also with lion's forelegs, bird's hindlegs, tail and wings, perhaps originally the beast of the god Iskur, later transcribed (as a second associated animal) to a number of Assyrian gods.

the bull, associated with the animal of a god whose forked lightning (symbol) identifies him as a weather deity (see Iskur).

the lion, associated at different times with a number of different deities, including Ningirsu and the goddesses Ninlil, Ishtar (Ishtar and Damkina (Damgalanina)).

the horse, at least by the seventh century BC the beast of the sun god Shamash (Šamaš).

the dog, sacred animal of the goddess Gula, the turtle and goat-fish of the water god Enki (Ea);

various types of natural and hybrid snakes and birds, associated with a variety of deities.

See Asag, Imdugud, Lamadnu.

beer see alcohol, libation

Bel see Marduk

Bellet-ili see mother goddesses and birth goddesses, Nergal, Ninhursaga

Bellet-ili see under Martu

bells  
It has been suggested that the 'Strong copper', one of the weapons of the god Ninurta (see Sham Heroes), may be a personified clanger or bell. However, the earliest bells found in Mesopotamia are Assyrian, dating to the first millennium BC. Allogical texts refer to the ringing of a bell as a means of driving away evil spirits. One example of an Assyrian bell has protective supernatural figures (see demons and monsters) depicted on it.



52 A small Assyrian copper or bronze bell, cast with figures of magical protective demons. It was probably used in rituals of exorcism. (From the British Museum collection.)

Berosus  
Berosus (a Greek form of a Babylonian name, perhaps Berossus) was a priest of the Marduk at Babylon in the late fourth to early third centuries BC. He wrote a three-volume work in Greek on the culture and history of Babylonia. An abridgement was made in the first century BC by Alexander Polyhistor.

Although also now lost, this served as a source for the Jewish historian Joseph ben Matthias ('Josephus', AD 37-100) and the church father Eusebius (died AD 342). Berosus was thus the ultimate source for authoritative knowledge of Babylonia by the ancient Greeks.

He is said to have emigrated in old age to the Aegean island of Cos, where he founded a school of astrology. There is no absolute certainty, however, that Berosus of Babylon and Berosus of Cos were one and the same. It is also possible that certain ideas attributed to Berosus in Classical sources were later in origin (so-called 'Pseudo-Berosus'), along with certain other traditions concerning his life, including that he was the father of the Sibyl.

The first book of his work *Babyloniaca* opened with an account of the beginnings of the world and the myth of Orpheus and other first-born monsters, who, emerging from the sea, first brought the arts of civilisation to mankind (see Seven Sages). It continued with the Babylonian creation story and an account of Babylonian astrology.

The second book recounted the history of Babylonia from the 'ten kings before the Flood' through the story of the Flood itself (see Ziusura), followed by the restored kingship down to the reign of Nabonassar (Nabû-nâsar, reigned 747-722 BC).

The third book dealt with the history of Babylonia down to Berosus' own time, including the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar II.

Assyrian mythological and historical texts found in modern excavations have largely confirmed the authenticity of the tradition represented by Berosus.

Bes  
Bes or Bazu was the Egyptian god of play and recreation, represented as a full-faced bow-legged dwarf, with oversized head, goggle eyes, protruding tongue, bushy tail and usually a large feathered crown as head-dress. He was a magically protective deity who averted the power of evil, and was especially associated with the protection of children and of women.

in childbirth. Some Egyptologists believe him to be of non-Egyptian origin, since he is said to come 'from the holy land' (the case interpreted as Arabia or Babylonia) and called 'Lord of Puor' (Punt, on the African coast of the Red Sea).

Representations of a very similar figure are found widely in Syria, Palestine, Assyria and Babylonia in the first millennium BC. Since Hes is not, however, mentioned in cuneiform literature, the god was not necessarily known in these regions by his Egyptian name.

donkey: see Innana

## bird gods

Some fragmentary stelae of Gudea, ruler of Lagash, show shaven-headed priests carrying standards surmounted by the figure of a bearded god wearing the head and splayed wings of a bird of prey as if they were an elaborate head dress. It has been suggested that since Ningirsu was symbolised by the horn-headed bird Imdugud, this deity associated with a nature-headed eagle might rather be identifiable as Ninurta. However, Ningirsu seems to have been nothing more than the horned form (in the city-state of Lagash) of Ninurta at this time. Perhaps the distinction is between the god Ningirsu/Ninurta himself and his familiar animal the Imdugud bird.

In some nineteenth-century BC Assyrian representations of the god in the winged disc, a bird-tail is shown beneath the disc as if it were one with the body of the god above. According to one idea, this is a bird god who can, again, be identified as Ninurta. The winged disc, however, appears to be a symbol of the sun-god Samas (L. 11).

bird-men: see animal skins, griffin-demon, Imdugud.

## birds

A number of different birds occur in Mesopotamian art as deities' symbols. One type, a long-necked species, first occurs in the Uruk Period, as a type of standard, with the bird

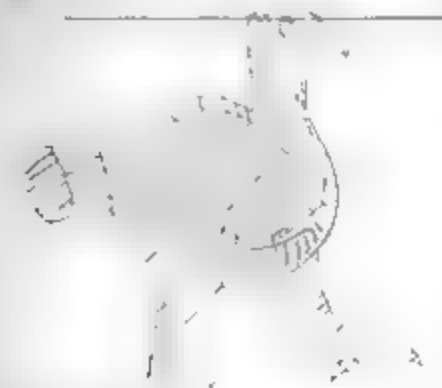


13 A Neo-Assyrian cast copper figurine of a dwarf god, of a type known in Egypt as Bes. It has a hollowed back and probably was originally fitted to a timber pole or stem of furniture. Found in a room in the residential area of the royal palace arsenal at Kalba (modern Nimrud). 8th-7th centuries BC. (L. 122mm)

shown on top of a small rod mounted on the back of a snake-dragon. The bird occurs on a Neo-Sumerian seal associated with a seated goddess, and on the Hays or an steatite after which it is named from art. Representations of a goose-like bird perched on a tall pole, shown on Parthian stamp seals, are probably unrelated.

Depictions of a walking bird are naturally common in Mesopotamia, but only in the Kassite period and in Neo-Babylonian glyptic art does the motif stand alone, as a religious symbol. An ornamental characteristic of a symbol of the minor god Papsukkal (Ninsuhur). A bird with hawk-headed head is found frequently in Kassite Period art as a divine symbol and attribute. The accompanying inscription on one *kudurru* is partially broken but probably named the Kassite god Halki. The symbol of a bird on a high perch, probably as a representation of a bird standard is common on the Kassite *kudurru*s and is mentioned in the inscriptions on two of them as a symbol of the obscure local gods Sima-muna and Simaha (see Kassite gods).

The motif of a bird on a high perch is also found on a clay tablet of the Neo-Assyrian period, which the inscription identifies as a symbol of the Assyrian war god Ninurta.



14 A Babylonian tablet. Detail from the carving on a tablet.

An Old Babylonian clay plaque shows a man riding an ostrich. However, the ostrich appears only rarely before the glyptic art of the Middle and Neo-Assyrian Periods. Often the bird is under attack from or being brooded by a pursuing eagle. The mythological or religious basis of these scenes is unknown. The early existence of the ostrich in Mesopotamia is proved by the presence of Sumerian graves of ostrich eggs. The top of the egg was severed and the open shell was used for a rim and base of pottery decorated with inlays.

A lion-headed man depicted in works of art from the Early Assyrian to the Neo-Assyrian Periods appears to represent Imdugud, Anzu, associated with the god Ninurta/Ninurta.

A common scene on cylinder seals of the Akkadian Period shows a large bird carrying the figure of a man, which has usually, although plausibly, been interpreted as depicting the flight episode in the myth of Enkidu.

See animal skins, Bou-Eunukkur, griffin, Zuzura. For the eagle-headed staff, see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods. For eagles, see dynasties.

## bird talons and wings

As a symbol in one's dream, the presence of bird talons and wings as part of the combination of various Mesopotamian demons and monsters suggests an association with death and the underworld. Some Babylonian poems describe the dead as clothed with bird-like plumage. The main literary basis for the idea, however, is a poetic account of a dream of an Assyrian prince, possibly the later King Assurbanipal (reigned 668-627 BC). In the dream, the prince descends to the underworld, which is peopled by a horde of unpleasant demons, described in graphic detail. In almost all cases these hellish demons are said to have been winged and to have had the talons of birds (or the feet of Imdugud, which amounts to the same thing).

The content of this poem, however, is unique as the first known description of the 'medical' image of a hell peopled by demonic figures. While this may represent a new and

powerful element in theological thinking, in descriptive terms it takes over elements already familiar in Assyrian iconography. Even in the Assyrian Period these iconographic elements were not confined to underworld denizens since they are shared by beneficent and magically protective figures. Moreover, the suggestion of an association of wings and talismans with creatures of the underworld cannot be applied to the art of earlier periods.

birth goddesses; see mother goddesses and birth goddesses

### bison

The bison survives today in Europe and North America. The Mesopotamian bison seems to have become extinct in pre-Sumerian times. The Sumerian term *gud-ahin* (Akadian *kusu-ahin*) was used, however, for the super-

natural figure of the bull-man, possibly also for the bull with human head. In Sumerian art, the bull-heads of the lures from the Royal Graves at Uruk, for example, have beards (made of apes' tails) that are reminiscent of the bison. Astronomically, the constellation *gud-ahin* (*kusu-ahin*) corresponds to part of Centaurus.

See Slain Heroes.

*ku-ahin*: see New Year ceremonies.

### boats

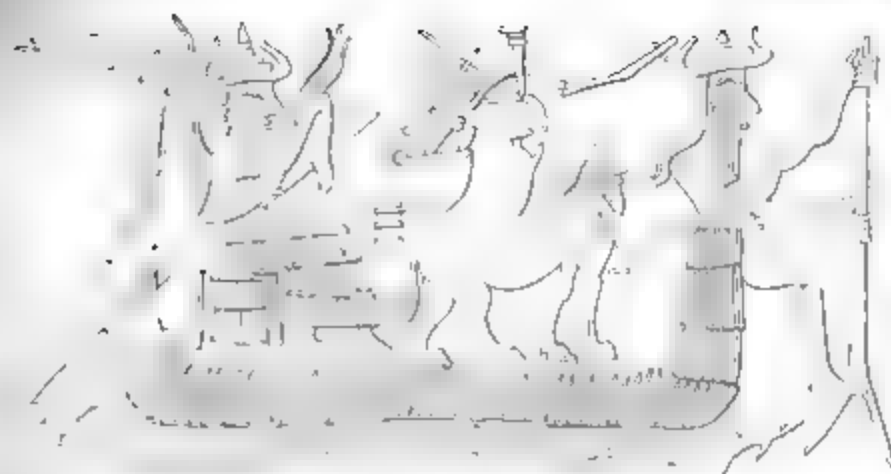
In Mesopotamia, the importance of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, their tributaries and the canals dug from them made boats essential for many commercial, state and ritual activities. Even deities had their own barges (see boats of the gods).

A common theme on cylinder seals, especially in the Early Dynastic and Akkadian Periods, involves human-looking figures sitting or standing in a boat. This has been interpreted as Gilgamesh and Utnapistu (*Ziusura*) in the Epic of Gilgamesh, but the suggestion is dubious, especially as the two heroes never actually travel by boat together in the surviving versions of the story, while the number of figures in the boat in artistic representations is not always limited to two. Gilgamesh does cross the waters with Utnapistu and Utnapistu, but it seems more likely that these boating scenes refer to various deliberate ritual excursions of even and perhaps sometimes of gods (see journeys and processions of the gods). In scenes of the presentation of offerings to a temple, common on seals of the Late Uruk Period, the procession of devotees, usually on foot, is sometimes shown approaching the temple by boat (or else on foot and by boat), as some temples were sited on the water-front. Occasionally a small shrine is mounted in a boat, while people standing on the same vessel approach from one side.

The Babylonians recognised a constellation called the Barge.

### boats of the gods

Just as the gods, or the cult statues which rep-



resented them, had houses (see temples and temple architecture), tables to eat from (see food and drink of the gods), beds, clothes, shoes and jewellery (see clothing, shoes, robes, etc.).

resumed them, had houses (see temples and temple architecture), tables to eat from (see food and drink of the gods), beds, clothes, shoes and jewellery (see clothing, shoes, robes, etc.). The boats were actually used when the statues of the gods made ritual journeys to visit one another at festival times (see journeys and processions of the gods). Individual boats had names. During that period of Mesopotamian history when each year was named after an important event of the preceding year (about 2300-2200 B.C.), the retaining and carrying of the boat of a god was a sufficiently grand and expensive undertaking to serve as a year name.

The god's statue would be stored in the temple and it seems that the cult statue of the god and some of the gods or goddess's treasure might be exhibited in the boat.

The boats of the gods are a favourite theme in Sumerian literature, especially in the various poems dealing with their journeys. In the

poem *Lugale* the god Ninurta travels home in his barge Ma-kar-nun-ta and the boatmen (rowers) venerate him with a hymn of praise. The Assyrian king Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 B.C.) made an offering of a ship of gold to the god Ea (Enki).

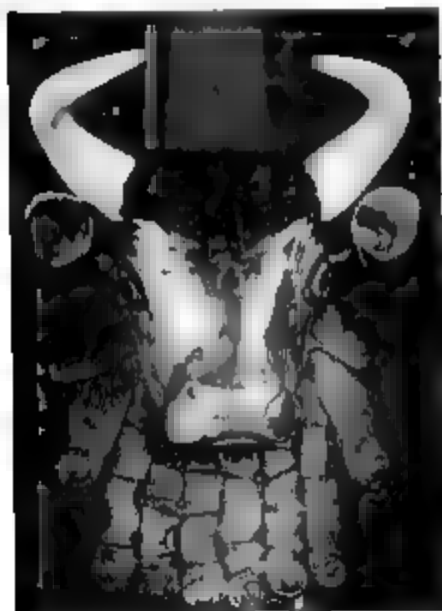
See Lamiatu's 'omega' symbol

### boats with human head

On seal designs of the Early Dynastic and Akkadian Periods, the boats which are shown conveying people or deities by river or canal are on occasion rendered with a prominent prow terminating in a human head, occasionally also with human torso and arms, with which the man-boat might actually row himself. Since the human head is sometimes crowned by a horned cap, it seems likely that the rendering is of a boat god (perhaps the minor deity Sursu), or in effect, perhaps, an animation and personification of the boat of a god.

Among the group of mythological characters known as the Slain Heroes, debated and killed by the god Ningirsu (or in an alternative version Ninurta), is one referred to as the *Magnum-boat*. Nothing is known of the form in which this creature was envisaged.

boundary stones: see kudurrus.



35 The gold head of a bison with affixed lapis lazuli beard. The ornament on the sound-box of a lute from the 'Royal Cemetery' at Uruk, Early Dynastic Period.

bow-legged dwarf see dwarf

# bucket and cone

In Near Assyrian art, objects resembling a pine cone and a bucket (or occasionally a bucket alone) are held as attributes by a number of different genies, often in association with the stylised tree, the 'cone' is held up in the right hand, the bucket held down in the left. Only very rarely are these objects held by figures which might be interpreted as entirely human; almost always they are held by genies or human-animal hybrids (see demons and monsters). As well as in front of the stylised tree the bucket and cone are seen held before floral decorative elements, guardian supernatural figures, the king or his attendants, or open doorways. The cone has been interpreted as a fir cone (*Pinus brutia*), as the male flower of the date palm or as a clay object in imitation of such. The bucket has been thought to have been of metal or wicker, and to have contained

either water or pollen (see stylised tree and its 'rituals'). Written sources on the matter are few, but it seems clear that the bucket and cone were associated with purification, for they are known respectively as *banduudu* (bucket) and, significantly, *mululu* (purifier), and figurines of genies holding these attributes were among the types placed within buildings for protection from malevolent demons and disease (see building rites and deposits, magic and surgery).

## building rites and deposits

In ancient Mesopotamia, building activities seem generally to have been accompanied by certain appropriate rites. During the construction of new buildings, especially temples, there were usually some religious ceremonies and magical practices associated with the consecration of the edifice, its purification, dedication and protection from demonic forces. The residents of private houses might employ

related rituals to safeguard themselves and their property from demons and diseases, at the completion of the building or at the outbreak of a particular illness. Such rituals are given a valuable insight in modern literature, as well as in building rites. They often involve the use of deposits of various kinds placed in the foundations or installed at the time of the dedication of a building by figurines (*gipar*).

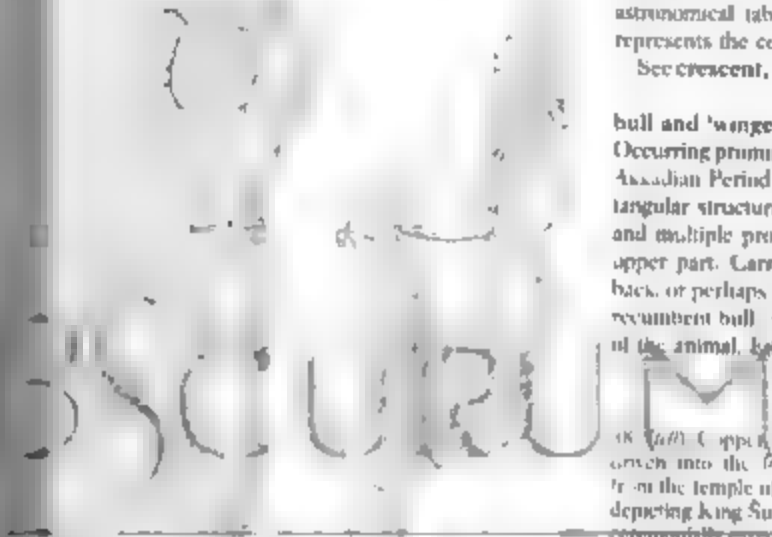
## bull

A bull's head on early historic painted pottery has been thought to symbolise a storm god, but without definite proof. From the Old Babylonian Period onwards, however, the bull is usually associated with a god whose attribute of lightning confirms his identity as a storm god. Thunderbolts are referred to as the 'bul-cakes' of the storm god Adad (Iškur). In the Old Babylonian Period, the bull can also be an attribute of the moon god Nanna-Suen, since it is associated with the crescent on seals. On astronomical tablets, the depiction of a bull represents the constellation Taurus.

See crescent, horned cap, wedge; zodiac

## bull and 'winged gate'

Occurring prominently on cylinder seals of the Akkadian Period is a motif of a tripartite rectangular structure with sealed central portion and multiple projections emanating from the upper part. Carrying the construction on its back, or perhaps simply kneeling in front of it, is a recumbent bull. A god or goddess sits in front of the animal, either the deity gestures to the



38 (left) Copper 'peg figurines' which were driven into the foundations of buildings. (left) In the temple of the goddess Inana at Nippur, departing king Sulgi of the Third Dynasty of Ur ceremonially carrying a builder's basket. (right) A deity securing the peg, from the time of Ur-Ningirsu of Lagash, son of Gungir.

39 (right) Goddess, bull and so-called 'winged gate' Detail from a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period

37 (left) Detail of the king and consort, with a small monumental figure, possibly from the Royal Palace of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin, who reigned 2254-2218 BC (modern Nimrud)





beast with raised hands, offers a small bowl, or else holds the animal's horns or the end of a halter fastened to a ring piercing its nostrils. Alternatively, or in addition, the deity holds a rope fastened to one side of the main construction, while a second rope attached to the other side is held by an attendant.

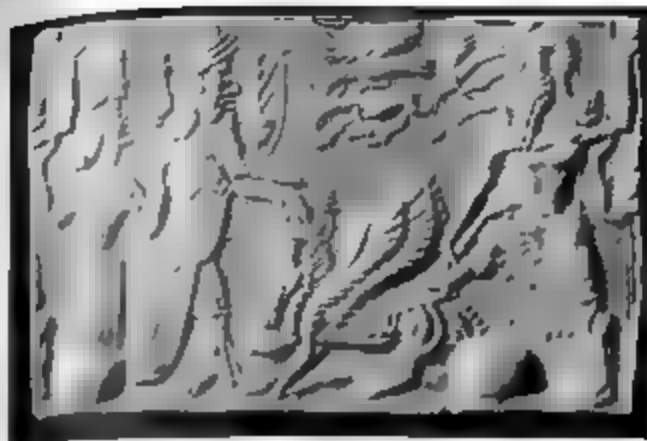
Some modern commentators have regarded the construction as a partly closed doorway, and have thought that the projections resemble wings, hence the term 'winged gate'. These projections have alternatively been regarded as rays of light, either of the morning sun (with the 'ropes' regarded as streams of water), or of the moon (the 'gate of night', shutting in the moon god in his aspect as the 'young bull of heaven'). Since the bull was also an animal of the storm god, a possible interpretation of the projections might be as flashes of lightning. A related theory sees in the subject a case of animal sacrifice in a conquering sky god. When the deity is a goddess, the scene has also been explained as a depiction of the myth of Ishtar (Inanna) and the Bull of Heaven. Probably, however, the scene represents an episode of some myth of the Akkadian Period, which is

now lost to us. That the iconography is very rarely attested after that time may suggest that the myth was no longer current, which would render its chances of recovery extremely slim.

#### bull-man

Bulls and Boos in quasi-human pose figure among the fabulous beasts of the so-called 'proto-Elamite' (early third millennium BC) glyptic art of south-western Iran. They have been interpreted as personifying the elementary principles of world order.

The figure of the 'bull-man', with human head and torso but taurine horns, lower body and legs, first appears in the second phase of the Early Dynastic Period, when the creature is to be seen very commonly on cylinder seals. He is usually shown in profile, with a single stubble horn projecting forward, although we know from those rarer occasions when either the head only or the whole body above the waist (but not below it) is shown in frontal view, that he was intended to be double horned. He appears singly, in pairs or even in triplicate, in conjunct scenes with rampant animals. Some times he is associated in his struggle with a



41 The heroes Gilgamesh and Enkidu slay the Bull of Heaven sent by the goddess Ishtar. Blue-glazed cylinder seal of the Neo-Babylonian Period, with modern impression. Ht 28 mm.



*Kusurku* (Sumerian *god-alien*), probably the name for the extinct bison, became the term for the bull-man (and possibly also for the bull with human head – see bulls and lions with human head). There is no basis for the suggestion that the figure of the bull-man in art represents the legendary hero Enkidu.

See 'Inanna's creatures, Slain Heroes, Ring-staff'.

human figure, from the later (Third) Early Dynastic Period usually with another stock figure, the horned bull with curls (see *Lion*). The figure seems to be a pair of figures, one of which is most common of all figures in the glyptic art of the Akkadian Period.

In the art of the Old Babylonian and Kassite Periods, the bull-man appears, as well as in sculpture, as an attendant of the sun god Shamash (Utu) in the scene on an Old Babylonian foundation tablet a pair of bull-men support the throne of this god.

From the Kassite Period, perhaps, the figure becomes a magically protective demon, and by Neo-Assyrian times it seems that his specific association with Shamash has been weakened: he might still be of the sun's symbol, and is also seen as a supporter of Shamash's winged disc, but the bull-man now appears as one of a repertoire of general symbols of creatures, monumental and small, on which were placed protective figures as a barrier to evil (see *Building rites and deposits, demons and monsters*). The bull-man is also found in the art of the Achaemenid Period.

#### Bull of Heaven

The Bull of Heaven was a mythical beast demanded by Ishtar (Inanna) from her father Anu (An) when he denied the city of Uruk when her amorous advances toward Gilgamesh were repudiated by the hero. The bull caused widespread destruction but was eventually killed by Gilgamesh with the assistance of Enkidu. As a taunt, Gilgamesh dedicated the animal's horns to his personal god Lugalbanda. The story is told both in the Sumerian poem 'Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven' and in tablet VI of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh.

As a constellation, the Bull of Heaven is Taurus (see *zodiac*), and it has been suggested that the story of Enkidu throwing the thigh of the bull at Ishtar attempts to account for the apparent lack of the bull's hind quarters in the outline of the constellation.

See *bull* and 'winged gate'.

40 The bull-man on clay reliefs. (left) Example from the Old Babylonian Period, place of discovery unknown. Ht 127 mm. (right) Example from the Neo-Assyrian Period, found in a brick box buried in the foundations of a building at Assur II. 14 mm.





42 A colossal stone gateway guardian in the form of a human-headed winged bull, one of a pair that originally flanked one of the entrances to the royal palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II (reigned 720–705 BC) at Dur Sarrukin (modern Khorsabad). The creature was designed to be viewed from either the front or side, hence its four legs. Ht 4.42 m

- bulls and lions with human head
- 43 A human-headed winged or wingless bull is a common motif in Mesopotamian art from the Early Dynastic Period through to Neo-Babylonian times, and was taken over also into the art of the Achaemenid Empire. Monumental sculptures of man-headed bulls and lions, and of the round were particularly common in the Neo-Assyrian Period (and similarly in Achaemenid times) as gateway guardians. Such figures adorned the palaces of the more important Assyrian kings from Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883–859 BC) until Esarhaddon (reigned 680–669 BC); their absence from the palace of King Assurbanipal (reigned 668–627 BC) was perhaps due to the lack of availability of large enough blocks of stone at that time. Some of Esarhaddon's bull-colossi were made from separate blocks fitted together. Male and female human-headed lions (often referred to as sphinxes) occur.

It is possible, but not certain, that the bull with human head was, like the bull-man, known in Akkadian as *lamassu* (see bison). The more usual identification with figures called by the Assyrians *aladlammu* (or *lamu* in and *lamu*) is also possible (see lama).

Bonnet see G11

burials see death and funerary practices

canals gods see Enbalulu Ennugi Enkidu Ningirsu

Cedar Forest see Gilgamesh: Huwawa

centaur

A figure human above the waist with, below, the body and all four legs of a horse, is known in the Kassite and Middle Assyrian Periods on seals and sealings and on kudurrus. It also occurs on Babylonian stamp-seals of Hellenistic date. Sometimes it has the tail of a scorpion. The human part is often shown armed with a bow or club, hunting other animals. In the Hellenistic Period the creature represents the god Paluhag.

See bison, lion-centaur, merman and mermaid

chapter

A so-called 'chapter', or string of beads, is carried as an attribute by a goddess who appears on the palace sculpture of King Assurnasirpal II of Assyria (reigned 883–859 BC). On Neo-Assyrian seals, the goddess carrying the chapter is sometimes Ishtar (Inanna). Sometimes the ring of the rod and ring attribute, often



43 A figure catching an antelope. Detail from a cylinder seal of the Middle Assyrian Period

44 A string of beads, held in the hand of a goddess. Detail of a carved stone monument, relief from the palace of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883–859 BC)

held by the more important gods, resembles such a chaplet. On the reliefs probably of King Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 BC) at Malta, male deities carry a 'rod and ring', goddesses just a ring, probably a similar chaplet.

#### chariots of the gods

Just as there were boats of the gods, so the gods also had chariots for use in travel and battle. They are often depicted standing in their chariots, especially the storm god Iškur/Adad. In actuality, the cult statues of the gods were transported by land in chariots and wagons. Perhaps on occasion, when documentary accounts describe a god as overseeing or actually involved in a battle, the statue of the god was conveyed to the battlefield.

Rimut is said to have been the charioteer (and in some accounts the sun) of Utu. At least in seventh-century BC theology, Lila was thought to ride his chariot across the sky by day, and through the 'interior of heaven' by night.

See *home; journeys and processions of the gods*.

charm: see *amulets; magic and sorcery*.

'cone-smearing' ceremony: see *bucket and cone; stylised tree and its 'rituals'*.



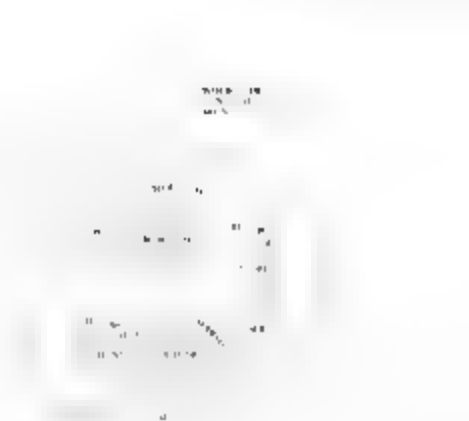
45 A worshipper pours a libation over an altar before a god (probably Iškur) riding in his chariot, drawn by a winged lion-dragon. A naked goddess stands on the back of the beast. From a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period.

#### cosmology

A variety of cosmological ideas were current at different periods of Mesopotamian history. The earlier, Sumerian, view of cosmology seems to have been one of a bipartite universe consisting of *an* (heaven) and *ki* (earth, including the underworld) (see *Du-ku*). Originally united and inhabited only by gods, they were at a primordial time separated from each other. This separation may have been connected with the need to have a place for mankind to inhabit. The earth was viewed as a rectangular field with four corners, an image which persisted, at least as a formulaic expression, into much later times.

The Babylonians, on the other hand, according to one tablet showing a map of the world, regarded the earth as a flat disc, with the salt sea surrounding it. Beyond the sea lay eight *naggi* (regions), one of which was the home of Utnapishtim (Ziusura), survivor of the Flood. Under the world, according to other sources, was the *apsu* (abyss) and below that the underworld, entered by a pair of bolted gates at the extreme eastern and western horizons, down to which the approach was by staircase. Through these the sun passed each day, entering at the west side and emerging at the east. A staircase also led up to heaven. According to one tra-

46 A bird's-eye view of the world as seen by the Babylonians, as described in the Babylonian Talmud. The world is a flat disc, surrounded by the salt sea. Beyond the sea are eight regions, one of which is the home of Utnapishtim (Ziusura), survivor of the Flood. Under the world is the *apsu* (abyss) and below that the underworld, entered by a pair of bolted gates at the extreme eastern and western horizons, down to which the approach was by staircase. Through these the sun passed each day, entering at the west side and emerging at the east. A staircase also led up to heaven.



dition, there were three superimposed heavens, the lowest of which contained the stars, the middle being the home of the Igigi and the upper that of Anu (An). In a separate source, tradition the eastern horizon was divided into three vertical bands (see *astrology and astronomy*).

The Babylonian Epic of Creation adapts this system, reflecting both the bipartite universe of heaven and earth (when Tiamat is split in two), and a four-part universe of heaven, lower (aeriform or Ethereal), earth (home of Marduk) and *apsu*.

Reflecting the old Sumerian idea of the separation of heaven and earth, an important cosmological image is that of the 'mooring-rope' or 'mooring pole' of heaven and earth (also called 'the new rope' as used for earth or its secondary part). A temple thought to be a channel of communication between earth and heaven might be so described.

See *creation*.

#### cow and calf

Without direct antecedents in early historic and Sumerian art, a group consisting of a cow and her calf is a common motif from the Old Baby-

lonian to the Neo-Assyrian Period, and recurs even in the Parthian era. The motif often appears to be a divine symbol, and has been interpreted as an emblem of Ištar (Gauru) or, perhaps with more probability, of Nin-hursaga. That the group was represented in apotropaic monumental sculpture, at least in Uruk, is proved by the record of the pieces plundered by Sargon II of Assyria from the temple of Haldi (see *Urukian gods*) at Musayir in 714 BC, which included 'one bull, one cow together with her calf'. The cow and calf motif was depicted on the Assyrian palace relief showing the sacking of the temple.

#### creation

Mesopotamian accounts of the beginning of the world vary according to which cosmology is followed. Generally, however, it is assumed that the gods have existed for a very long time, but not forever, and that man is a later arrival on the scene. Nammu was the mother who gave birth to An (heaven), Ki (earth) and the other 'great gods' (See also *Ankur and Kusar*).

To express the idea of creation various images were used. First, the idea of sexual inter-

course between gods: the god Nanna was the offspring of Enlil and Ninlil. Enki and Ninhursaga produced a series of eight deities. An and Ki produced natural vegetation. Enlil and Kur produced Summer and Winter, personified in a Sumerian poem.

Second, the image of modelling by hand a figurine of clay was used, particularly for the creation of mankind. Either a mother goddess such as Nannu or Aruru, or else Enki, moulds the creature (sometimes with another goddess standing by as 'midwife'). In the Epic of Atra-hasis, the clay is mixed with the blood of a slain god. In the Epic of Creation, man is apparently created solely from the blood of a slain god, Qingu.

Finally, the quickening power of the divine utterance is seen as responsible for creation. Especially Enki is described as undertaking the organisation of the universe and as accomplishing this solely by the creative power of his word.

Personal gods are sometimes described as being responsible for the creation of the individual under their protection.

See BERNARD, Igigi, Sacred Marriage.

# crescent

The recumbent crescent moon occurs as a motif in Mesopotamian art from prehistoric times down to the Neo-Babylonian Period, and at least from the Old Babylonian Period is known from inscriptions to have been a symbol of the moon god Sin (Nanna-Suen). Its Akkadian name was *nikaru*. In all periods a common variant placed the emblem on a post, sometimes with elaborate trimmings, when it appears as an independent motif or is held by gods, goddesses, or animal or hybrid figures. Probably it was then considered to have a magically protective power. From the Old Babylonian Period onwards, and especially from Kassite times, Sin's crescent was often depicted within a disc, sometimes his appears to be a fusion of the crescent and solar disc, as if symbolic of an eclipse. In Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art, the upper body of a god, presumably Sin, may appear emerging from the

crescent. On at least one Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal we find a winged crescent with centrally placed god, who wears a crescent-headed cap, and smaller inward-facing deities on the ends of the wings, in apparent imitation of the common symbol of the gods on the winged disc.

See 'omega' symbol; star (symbol).

# crook

The crook-headed staff is an element mainly occurring in Old Babylonian glyptic art. It occurs as an isolated motif, held by a god, or set above a goat or sitting dog. It is often placed close to the 'figure with mace', with whom it may, therefore, have been associated. It is a symbol of the god Amurru (Maru).

On a Kassite seal the crook is held by the fish-garbed figure, who is associated with Ea (Enki). On Neo-Assyrian seals a god who stands upon a goat-fish, probably Ea, sometimes carries the crook, here it may serve simply as a crude representation of the god's staff with ram's head (see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods).

The constellation called the Crook corresponds to Auriga (see zodiac).

# cross

Apart from the swastika, the only cruciform motif attested as a distinct element in Mesopotamian art is the 'cross formée', a form approximating to that today known as the Maltese cross. In prehistoric and early historic art, the form occurs only as part of geometric and floral designs, or in isolated contexts to which it is difficult to attach with any certainty a religious meaning. After the Early Dynastic Period the motif disappears from art until the mid-second millennium BC.

Appearing frequently on Kassite Period cylinder seals (with a rarer variant on Middle Assyrian) the 'Kassite cross', as it has been called, probably had an independent origin. It may have been a symbol of the Kassite sun deity. It appears in contexts which strongly suggest that it is a sun symbol, substituting for the solar disc, or in positions later occupied by

the winged disc. These include, most commonly, positioning between a god with raised hands and a worshipper (the latter sometimes, in fact, omitted), above scenes of bathing, or in association with the stylised tree. The cross does not, however, appear on the kudurrus, where the solar disc represents the sun god.

In Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian art, the cross was apparently normally replaced by the winged disc. Sculptures of Assyrian kings, however, can show them wearing divine symbols as earrings or as pendants strung upon a necklace, and in these cases it is the cross



47 A crescent (here as a form of cross) within a disc, symbol of the moon god Sin (Nanna-Suen).



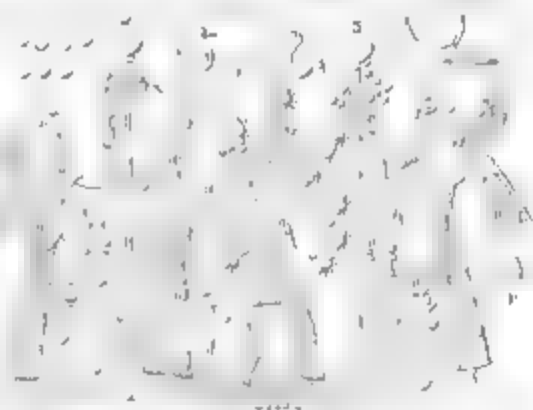
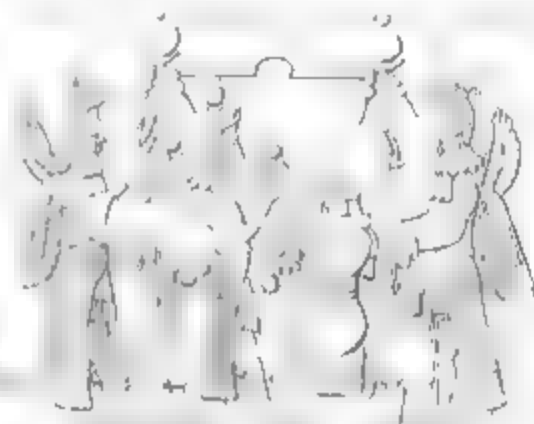
48 A Neo-Assyrian version of a cross, probably a symbol of the sun god Samas.

49 (right) Scenes of worship before the cult statue of the goddess Ishtar standing in her shrine. From a cylinder seal of the Neo-Babylonian Period, of a motif probably attributable to the seventh centuries BC.

rather than the winged disc which is invariably to be seen. It is only rarely that the cross stands in place of the winged disc on Assyrian seals, but here in some cases it is shown with four undulating projections, probably solar rays, emerging diagonally from its intersections. These are strong indications for the cross as a further symbol (together with the solar disc and winged disc) of the sun god Samas (Utu).

# cult statues

The gods manifested themselves on earth through the vehicle of their cult statues. Without exactly being the god, the statue was



regarded as much more than his or her image, since it was imbued with (but did not in any way restrict) the divine presence. The closest parallel in modern religions, perhaps, is the role of the icon in Eastern Orthodoxy, while in the secular field it may be as well to remember that the eye of a child will see life and personality in a doll which, on another level, the mind recognises as an inanimate toy.

Cult statues were made at least as early as the Third Dynasty of Ur, usually carved in an expensive imported wood, overlaid with gold. In the Babylonian periods, at least, the newly dedicated image was imbued with the presence of the deity by the performance of rituals, known as 'Washing the mouth' and 'Opening the mouth'. Since the deity needed to eat and drink (see *food and drink of the gods*), the temple kitchens would prepare daily meals. Animals and plants were raised and grown in the temple's fields or were contributed by local fishermen and farmers. The sacrifices and offerings of devotees supplemented the stocks of food, which, in practice, were eaten by the clergy and temple staff. The cult statue was not only fed, but also dressed in the finest garments, constantly bathed, taken to bed in the god's richly adorned bedchamber, and treated to festivities and entertainments, such as music. Diversions from the routine were provided by the great monthly festivals and other special occasions, such as visits by land or river to other cities (see *boats of the gods*, *chariots of the gods*, *journneys and processions of the gods*).

See *nude woman*, *Sacred Marriage temples* and *temple architecture*.

## Dagan

**Dagan** (Hebrew *Dagon*) was a West Semitic corn god who came to be worshipped extensively throughout the Near East, including Mesopotamia. The original meaning of the name is unknown, but *dagan* is a common word in Hebrew and Ugaritic for 'grain' and according to one tradition the god Dagan was the inventor of the plough.

Dagan's cult is known at Mari from about

2500 BC, at Ebla about 2300 BC and at Ugarit over a thousand years later. Sargon of Agade and his grandson Naram-Suen attributed many of their conquests to the power of Dagan. At some point Dagan became the principal god of the Philistines.

At Lagash, on the Mediterranean coast, Dagan was regarded as the father of the god Haal (Hilad) and second only in rank to the supreme god El. However, he is not an important figure in Ugaritic myths. His rôle as vegetation god seems to have been largely usurped by Haal by about 1500 BC.

At an early date Dagan was assimilated into the Sumerian pantheon, but only as a minor deity, attendant upon Enki. The goddess Sala became his spouse; in a different tradition, Dagan's wife was Išhara. It was said to be by the might of his creator Dagan that Hammurabi of Babylon was able to conquer the city of Mari, while the contemporary Assyrian king Šamsi-Adad I, 'worshipper of Dagan', built a temple to the god at Terqa, which he named 'E-Lagar, the House of Luminous Offerings'. In an Assyrian poem, Dagan sits, along with Nergal and Mizaru (see *good and evil*), at the mouth of the dead when they reached the underworld. In Babylonian belief Dagan kept with him in the underworld in everlasting bondage the seven children of the god Enmešarra (see *Seven (gods)*).

A tradition dating back at least to the fourth century AD of Dagan as a fish deity is erroneous.

## Damgalnuna (Damkina)

Damgalnuna is the earlier Sumerian name of the goddess Damkina. Fish offerings were made to her in Lagash and Umma in early times, but her principal cult centre was the city of Uruk. Perhaps originally one of a number of mother goddesses, she achieved an independent personality as the wife of Enki. In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, Ea (Enki) and Damkina are the parents of the god Marduk. Assurnasipal II, king of Assyria (883-859 BC), built a temple to them at Kalbu (modern Nimrud).

The animal associated with Damkina was the lion; astrologically she was associated with the constellation called the Wagon of Heaven (Ursa Minor).

**Damkina**: see *Damgalnuna*.

## Damu

A water-bearing who drives away demons and one's evil influences, Damu was honoured especially at Isin and also at Larsa, Uruk and perhaps Uruk. He was also regarded as a son of the goddess Ninisina and as a son of, or equivalent with, the god Ningiszida (although the Akkadian translation of a Sumerian poem erroneously describes him as a 'daughter' of Ninisina). In most details, Damu and sometimes he seems to be more closely linked with the circle of Nanshe. It is unclear whether the Damu worshipped at Isin and Larsa in Syria was the same deity or a local hero. The official cult of Damu seems to have died out after the Old Babylonian Period.

Astrologically, Damu was associated with the constellation called the Pig (probably Delphinus).

In some Sumerian poems, Damu is addressed as 'Damu, birthless, possible, hate, different third, perhaps meaning "child", involved here'.

Damu was a good and evil.

## dead gods

In Mesopotamia, although immortality was reserved for the gods (see *Siduri*), not all gods were immortal. A number of deities were regarded as dead but were, however, exempt from death. Only Ziusura Urašipai was granted eternal life, while others (including the human-like *Gilgamesh*) would perish.

Unlucky mortal men could not seem ever to have been cured of diseases, nor generally of the attacks of demons (although Damu was seized by githu). Dead gods were usually those who had been slain. Seals of the Akkadian Period show deities in battle, sometimes one slaying another.

The idea that gods could be killed as well as created is met with near the beginning of the Babylonian Epic of Creation, when Apsû (see *abzu*), having engendered a line of deities by his union with Tiamat, almost immediately decides to destroy them again because of the nuisance they have caused him. In fact, the tables are turned, and Apsû himself falls victim at the hands of Ea (Enki). The subsequent deaths of Tiamat is presented as playing a crucial part in the creation of the universe, since heaven and earth (ku) are made from the two separated halves of the monster's body (see *cosmology*). Furthermore, humankind is created, in part, from the blood of Tiamat's consort the god Qingu, who meets his death, following Tiamat's defeat, by a kind of judicial execution. Apparently, the eleven monstrous creations of Tiamat who have fought at her side (Tiamat's creatures) are killed by Marduk in the great battle, but statues of them are placed by Marduk in the *apsû* (abzu).

Nothing in detail is known of the myth or myths concerning the killing of the Sumerian *Hermes*, but it seems clear that they were gods who were believed to be long dead, yet who



30 One god cuts the throat of another. Both figures wear the horned cap of divinity. From a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period.

continued to receive offerings (see *sacrifice and offering*) and worship just as living gods. Their slaying by Ningirsu or Ninurta is paralleled by Marduk's defeat and killing of the creatures of Tiamat. Since in both cases images of these slain monsters were made (statues of Tiamat's creatures, at least, were in the first millennium BC regarded as magically protective demons), it seems that, in spite of being dead, these gods were thought still to possess some effective powers. Similarly the magical power and wisdom of ancient (and probably dead) gods such as Lahmu and even the Seven Sages could be harnessed by the moulding of a figurine in the image of the creature and by the recital of incantations to imbue the figure with the dead entity's presence (see *magic and sorcery*). Huwawa/Humbaba slain by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, is a further case in point: probably his image was believed to be effective as a magical force against evil.

For men, 'death' usually meant journeying to the underworld (see *afterlife: death and funerary practices*), but for a god who was not dismembered (as Tiamat or Qingu were) the precise meaning of his or her 'death' is unclear. Huwawa seems simply to disappear from the scene, as if into oblivion: we do not hear of his doings or sufferings after death. Some 'dead gods', however, seem to have had underworld associations.

The most famous 'dead god' of ancient Mesopotamia is Dumuzi. Since he was a shepherd god, the tradition of his death and rebirth was possibly an aetiological myth related to the passage of the seasons. The god's 'death' seems to have involved his forced abduction to the underworld. (See *Nongikizida*.)

Another god described as 'dead' is Gugal-ana, the first spouse and consort of the underworld queen Ereshkigal. In the Sumerian poem 'Inanna's Descent to the Nether World', in order to gain admission to the underworld, Inanna says that she has come to attend the 'funeral' of Gugal-ana, her brother-in-law. Whether Gugal-ana's 'funeral' merely commemorated his removal to the infernal regions (in a certain sense his 'death') or whether it

followed a 'second' death in the underworld – whatever might be understood by that – is unknown. (Inanna herself, on her visit to the nether regions, is described in terms that suggest her 'death'.)

Some baked clay figurines possibly of the Isin-Larsa or Old Babylonian Period show a god who seems to be lying in a coffin. This has been interpreted as Nergal, lord of the underworld, at rest.

#### death and funerary practices

It was believed in ancient Mesopotamia that immortality was reserved for gods; death was the inevitable lot of man (see *Siduri*). Not was the afterlife considered very palatable: in the Sumerian underworld the dead consumed dust, while the Assyro-Babylonian hell was peopled by a plethora of stimulating demons and monsters. This is in marked contrast to Egyptian concepts of the glorious life to come, which gave rise to the practice of embalming and mummification. Mesopotamian pessimism in this regard probably arose from the comparatively harsh conditions of almost every aspect of life, the alluvial plain of Sumer being well suited to agricultural production but lacking virtually all raw materials, except for natural clay.

It has been suggested that the practice of burial in the prehistoric societies of Mesopotamia sought either to maintain close communication with the deceased, by means of a cult of the dead, or, conversely, to restrain the dead from haunting the living, as they would do if left unburied and free to wander (see *gidim*). The Sumerian rite of pouring libations into the ground by means of a clay pipe, probably intended to give the deceased a drink, may be evidence that the dead were believed to remain in their graves. In the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur, however, as illustrated by a funerary poem, there was a belief in different treatments of the dead on arrival in the underworld dependent upon the nature of their burials. The proper burial of the deceased was therefore of crucial importance to his or her future life.

The most usual practice throughout the ancient Near East seems to have been inhumation of the body in the earth or in a coffin. Although the almost complete absence of adult burials of the Uruk Period almost certainly indicates the practice of exposing corpses to natural cremation (the burning of the bodily remains), does not seem to have been practised in any period: there is no evidence in excavated graves in Mesopotamia for the use of fire. A Sumerian text suggests that to be burned to death accidentally was regarded as a worst plight indeed (see *afterlife*).

The earliest known human remains in Mesopotamia have been excavated at Shanidar

Cave in the Zagros mountains. The nine skeletons (seven adults and two infants) do not all belong to a single period, but date from perhaps about 60,000 to 45,000 years ago.

The majority of burials known from archaeological excavations have been found in cemeteries. These involve the graves of male and female adults and children. Young children were sometimes buried in the same graves as (male or female) adults, and in certain periods there is evidence for a blood relationship in such cases. Babies, however, were normally not buried in the cemeteries but either under the floors of private houses, often in cooking pots (sometimes with a hint of



51. A human burial of the Late Uruk Period, excavated in 1933 at the site of Uruk, perhaps ancient Eridu.

human sacrifice), or simply tossed onto rubbish dumps as if they were regarded as sub-human. Adults were also buried beneath the floors of houses, but only rarely in rubbish tips.

The relative wealth and degree of elaboration in the construction of graves varies considerably according to time, place and, in some periods, the social status of the individuals involved. Sumerian burials can show a very high level of effort and expenditure, most notably with the so-called 'Royal Tombs' at Ur but also in the richly furnished graves in cemeteries at some urban sites. At less wealthy

sites, however, burials can have comparatively little in the way of grave goods. By the first millennium BC, an exaggerated social differentiation is apparent within given cultures. Neo-Assyrian burials, for example, range from simple pit burials with few or no funerary goods, through wealthier interments often in 'bath-tub' caskets of terracotta or copper or even, in fantastically wealthy graves such as those of the Assyrian queens very recently discovered at Kalhu (modern Nimrud).

The construction of graves ranges from simple pits, through slightly more elaborate burials with burial chambers bricked off from

the access shaft and rock-cut or stone-capped tombs, to brick or stone mausolea involving considerable cost and effort in construction. (If the burial chamber, even in the poorest graves, seems to have been lined with reeds or palm leaves, loose or in the form of woven mats. The body was often covered in a similar material.)

In the Early Dynastic contemporary northern Mesopotamian (Sumerian) and early Hittite burials the body has usually been found in the flexed or so-called 'sleeping' position (with the legs together, bent and raised), though not often in the crunched or so-called 'fetal' posture (with legs tightly flexed and close to the chin). Later the preferred position seems to have been the stretched posture with the body laid out full length, legs straight, and hanging on the side or back.

The orientation of burials was often by the points of the compass, and can sometimes be shown to be related to other factors such as the sex or age of the deceased. Preferred orientation, or avoidance of certain orientations, varied according to period and location.

Except in the case of very wealthy individuals, adorned with a mass of jewellery, evidence of the clothing worn by the deceased is slim, since in the arid conditions of the Mesopotamian plain textiles rarely survive. A few fragments have, however, been found. Those from one Ninevite 5 Period burial have been identified as silk and linen. The fairly common occurrence of copper or bronze pins, often found on the chest or at the shoulders, does suggest that the body was usually dressed. Beads have often been found in large numbers as necklaces (or more rarely strung around the waist) or in smaller numbers or individually at the wrists (on occasion close to the ankles). Numbers of cylinder seals have also on rare occasions been found strung around the wrist, perhaps worn as beads; more usually a single seal was placed separately in the grave.

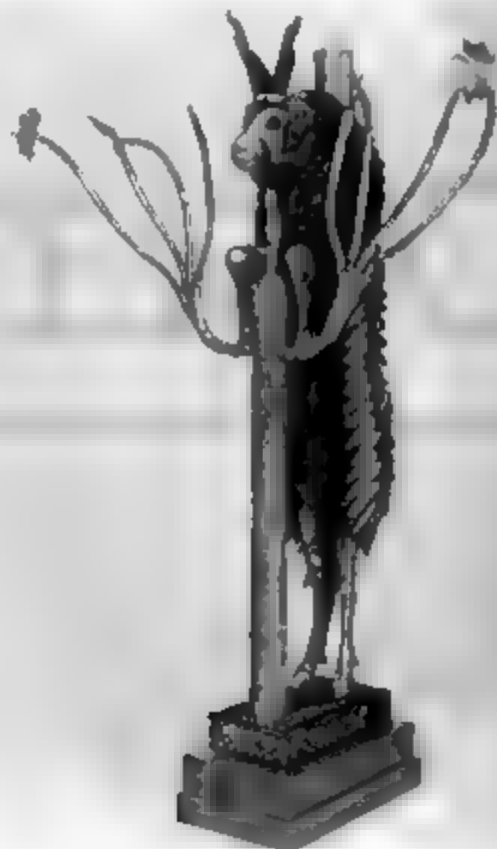
Burials without grave goods were not uncommon, but even an impoverished burial would often contain a pot or two, even a broken one. Pottery is the most common of objects

found in graves, although it is difficult at times to distinguish between those vessels which were themselves funerary offerings and those which served merely as carriers for food, drink, washing water or cosmetics. There is only occasional, and equivoocal, evidence for vessels made purposefully for the grave. 'Sets' of vessels of differing sizes, placed one inside another, and apparently to be used together, are common, however, in Sumerian and Ninevite 5 burials. The position of the vessels within the graves may – almost accidentally – give us some indication of their intended purpose. For even if not expressly governed by positioning, it would be natural to locate the more important and personal items close to the body, with other objects piled into the remaining space. In Early Dynastic and Ninevite 5 burials the deceased often holds a small bowl in front of the face as if to eat; even when no vessel is present, the hands are normally held in this position and perhaps originally held some food, long since perished. The bones of a small animal have in one case been retrieved from the bowl in this position. The bones of larger animals and the carbonised remains of cereals, probably the remains of food or sacrificial offerings (see animal sacrifice), have sometimes been found in the graves. A large vessel often placed close to the head, regularly with a smaller pot sitting within its rim, was perhaps a provision of drinking water, complete with scoop. Another large vessel is sometimes found together with a large natural stone slab (the so-called 'gravestone'). These have been interpreted as a container for washing water and an ablution slab.

Smaller stones and pebbles, sometimes of differing colours and carefully placed in the body, have been interpreted as having a symbolic or magical function.

Tools and weapons are not very common in Mesopotamian burials of any period.

The grave goods seem to have served a variety of purposes. Some objects were so personal to the deceased that their inclusion in the grave was natural, since they would not be used by others. Except in the richest graves, this



52 An elaborate object used for supporting some grave furnishing. The pin is made of sheet lapis lazuli and gold on a wooden core. One of a pair found in one of the fantastically rich Royal Tombs at Ur. Early Dynastic Period. IR 4700m.



category of goods probably comprised only items of clothing or children's toys. A second category of items was included for the use of the dead person in or on their way to the afterlife, or as gifts for the denizens of the underworld (referred to in texts of the Early Dynastic Period and Third Dynasty of Ur). Finally, goods eventually assigned to the grave could represent a public display of wealth by the deceased's family and friends during the funeral ceremonies. Probably in the case of high-ranking or wealthy individuals an elaborate ceremony accompanied the procession from the house to the site of burial, although for Mesopotamia we have little in the way of evidence for the rites involved (in contrast to the depictions on Egyptian murals).

It is this aspect, the apparent relationship between the wealth of an individual in death and his or her wealth and/or status in life, which has stimulated a renewed interest by archaeologists in burial practices during the last quarter century. Once considered only a basis for (often imaginative) speculations on religious beliefs, burial practices are now widely studied as evidence of social stratification. Specialists in the archaeology of ancient Mesopotamia have not only been slow to make use of mortuary evidence in this way, but a number of recent studies have laid the groundwork for what may be a fruitful area of research in the near future.

See **Adapa**; **animal sacrifice**; **dead gods**; **Dilmun**; **diseases and medicine**; **galla**; **Gilgamesh**; **human sacrifice**.

### dedication

At every period it was considered proper for a ruler or noble to dedicate some of his spoils to his or his city's special protective deity. Such objects usually carry inscriptions to this effect and became part of the temple's treasure. Valuable ceremonial objects, often of precious materials, might also be dedicated to a god in peace time for the 'life' of an individual, especially a ruler, by the individual himself or by one of his 'servants', possibly as a thanksgiving following illness or some other crisis.

There is not much evidence that objects were dedicated in connection with vows or pledges (votive offerings), but small models of e.g. beds or genitalia, feet or other limbs were probably dedicated either as thank offerings by those who believed the solution of their sexual problems or bodily illnesses to be due to a particular deity, or as propitiations by those hopeful of achieving cures.

Ancient Mesopotamian society always took slavery for granted, and an extension of this was the dedication of certain human beings as 'be offerings' to the gods. At different periods this took different forms, with varying social effects. The dedication in the Old Babylonian Period of the daughters of wealthy families to a god and their confinement within a cloister did not stop these women engaging in complicated financial transactions, but at least ensured that their property reverted to their family on their death (since they were forbidden to marry) and so prevented dissipation of the inheritance. In later Babylonian times the temple *irkum* (dedicated slaves) was an order of male and female persons dedicated to Marduk, Nabû, Samas (A tu), Nergal or Ishtar (Annu). Parents dedicated their children and freedmen their slaves. They were branded with a star, spade or wedge.

See **priests and priestesses**.

### dedication of kings

The dedication of kings during their own lifetime was confined to a limited period of Mesopotamian history. The first king to become a living god was Narâm-Suen, king of Akkad (reigned 2310-2274 BC) and the practice continued with the subsequent kings of Akkad of the Third Dynasty of Ur, and with those of the dynasties of Isin, Larsa and Babylon down to Samsu-dinana (reigned 1684-1651 BC). Kings who were deified claimed to be sons or brothers of major gods (see **Lugalbanda**). A cult was offered to deified kings in temples throughout their kingdoms, and praise poetry was composed in their honour.

See **Sacred Marriage**; **temples and temple architecture**.

**demies**: see **gods and goddesses**.

### demons and ministers

- 33 In most religions there is a belief in various kinds of supernatural beings ranking between the level of gods and men. 'Demon', in its original Greek sense (*daimon*), supernatural being, is used sometimes as an approximate translation of Akkadian terms like *rubru* (Sumerian *malikum*), which can refer to, and be qualified as, a good or bad 'demon'. In spells of the Neo-Assyrian Period, we read 'Get out, evil *rubru*! Come in, good *rubru*!'

In modern studies of ancient Mesopotamian art and iconography, however, the term demon has generally been applied to any upright human-bodied hybrid creature, while 'monster' has been applied to an animal combination on all fours.

Demons only rarely figure in mythology. The stories of demons whose names are known to us are mentioned mainly in magical incantations. Generally, 'evil' demons seem to have been conceived as mere agents and servants of the will of gods; their role was to implement divinely ordained punishment for sin. Such evil demons were often imagined as weather spirits, of the wind or storms. Their usual method of attacking humans was by inflicting diseases (but not all illness was thought to be due to them); there is no evidence for a general belief in demonic possession. Evil gods and demons are only very rarely depicted in art, perhaps because it was thought that their images might endanger people; in some cases descriptions of their appearances are so vague and inconsistent as to suggest they were not well established. By the first millennium BC, however, Lamastu is commonly represented, usually in connection with incantations against her, while Pazuzu is even shown forcing Lamastu back to the underworld. This change may be related to a new concept in the first millennium BC of an underworld populated by demonic beings.

A greatly simplified but plausible chronology for the development of demons and min-

istry in ancient Mesopotamian art has adopted a division into five main phases, namely:

- (1) a formative phase, in the late Uruk and Uruk Periods, when the features of different animals were first combined into unnatural composite beings;
- (2) an optimistic phase, in the Akkadian Period, when glyptic scenes show the capture and punishment of nefarious demons;
- (3) a balanced phase, in the Old Babylonian Period, when cylinder seal designs often mix images (gods, symbols and other motifs) of good and bad associations with respect to mankind;
- (4) a transformative phase, with Mitannian, Kassite and Middle Assyrian art of the fourteenth to eleventh centuries BC, when the human-centred imagery of the Old Babylonian Period gave way to a preponderance of animal-headed hybrids;
- (5) a demonic phase, represented by Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art, when individual evil demons were depicted in their full horror.

This last phase of development accords well with the new theory of a demonically populated underworld in the first millennium BC. The change happens, moreover, at the same time as the advent of the practice of erecting in palaces and temples monumental statues and reliefs of magically protective beings, and of burying small clay images of them in the foundations. Diverse in cultural background and original significance, the various gods, demons and monsters involved were brought together into a fairly restricted visual series at this time, and for the first time they came to be treated as a group in mythological narratives.

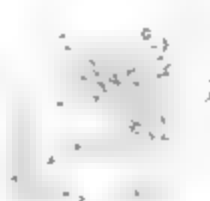
See **galla**; **good and evil**, **luma**, 'omega' symbol; **udug**.

**destiny and fate**: see **divination**; **divine intervention**; **diseases and medicine**; **mc**; **Namtar**, tablet of destinies.

## 53 Demons, monsters and minor protective deities.



bulls and lions with human head



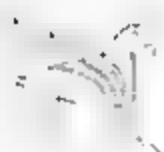
lion-centaur



Bull of Heaven



centaur



griffin



lion-dragon

Asakku  
(Arag) Anzu  
(Imdugud)

snake-dragon



goat-fish



lion-fish



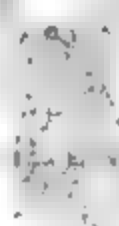
snakes



Imdugud

Ninshur  
(god)Seven  
(gods)Lagal-irra  
and  
Meslamta-eaSmiting  
godUsnu  
(Isimud)

Iama



genies



Lahmu



bull-man



lion-humanoid



lion-demon



La-tarak



Lamastu



Pazuzu



bird-man



scorpion-people



griffin-demon

fish-garbed  
figuremerman  
and mermaidHuwawa  
(Humbaba)

Bes

## Dilmun

Dilmun (or Telmun) was a Mesopotamian name for Bahrain and an area of the western coast of the Gulf (the latter area apparently called Agar by the inhabitants of Dilmun themselves), possibly also including Failaka and other islands. It became increasingly important in Mesopotamian trade from the end of the Early Dynastic Period on.

In the poem 'Enki and Ninhursaga' Dilmun is described as a 'holy', 'virgin' and 'pure' land without any normal civilisation, human or animal, or even water supplies. At the request of his wife-daughter, the goddess Nintikua (Ninhursaga), Enki first arranges for Dilmun to be provided with fresh water and abundant produce. Then in a series of incestuous unions a number of gods and goddesses are born, among them the 'Lord of Dilmun' and the 'Lord of Alagan'. Recent work on the geography of the Gulf suggests that a number of low islands may have gradually risen from the water towards the end of the third millennium, and it is possible that the myth is connected with this. The fuller text of the poem now available shows that Dilmun was not, as was earlier thought, described as a 'paradise' land.

According to another Sumerian poem, after the Flood the gods settled Ziusura in 'a foreign land, the land of Dilmun in the east'.

The idea in some modern literature that Bahrain was a 'sepulchral island' where the bodies of the wealthy or eminent would be shipped for burial from the Mesopotamian or Arabian mainland has no reliable basis. It derives from a consideration of the numbers of Bronze Age burial mounds present on the island, the apparent lack of corresponding settlement sites, and the suggestion that certain tombs, recorded as 'empty' by their excavators, were pre-purchased sites awaiting their occupants. In fact, although the low levels of soil above bedrock necessitated the construction of above-ground tombs, which makes them abnormally visible, the numbers involved (most recently estimated at some 172,000) are not excessive for a local population, especially given the increasing numbers of Bronze Age

settlements now identifiable on the ground, though little investigated. The supposed 'empty' graves can for the most part be explained by lack of archaeological technique in the excavation of often disturbed or poorly preserved burials.

## Dilmunite gods

The two principal gods of Dilmun, the god Inzak and the goddess Meskialak, are referred to in both Mesopotamian and Dilmunite sources. Inzak was regarded by the Sumerians (by whom he was called Enzag) as the chief god of Dilmun, but in Dilmun itself he was characterised as a god of Agar (eastern Arabia). He probably also had a cult centre on Failaka island, where the temple seems to have been dedicated to him. In the Neo-Babylonian Period he was identified with Nabû. A god called Inzak was also worshipped in Elam, as one of a trinity with Ea (Enki) and the Elamite god Inshushinak.

The name Meskialak, goddess of the city of Dilmun, must be related to Ninsikala, another name for Ninhursaga. Nîn Dilmun, 'lady of Dilmun', was probably a title of the same goddess. She may have been regarded as either the wife or mother of Inzak. A Babylonian hymn refers to a goddess called Sulubitu as wife of Enzag.

Another goddess was Lahamu, described as the 'Serpent of Dilmun'.

Some Mesopotamian gods are referred to in texts found in Bahrain, including Enki, Damgalnuna, Adad (Iskur) and Marduk. However, despite Enki's relationship with Dilmun in Sumerian myth (probably a result of trading connections between Sumer and Dilmun from the time of the Third Dynasty of Uruk onwards), Enki is not explicitly mentioned as a deity of Dilmun and there are no grounds for supposing that his cult was established there or that the temple at Barbar on Bahrain was dedicated to him (as is commonly assumed).

Dingirmah: see mother goddesses and birth goddesses.



## diseases and medicine

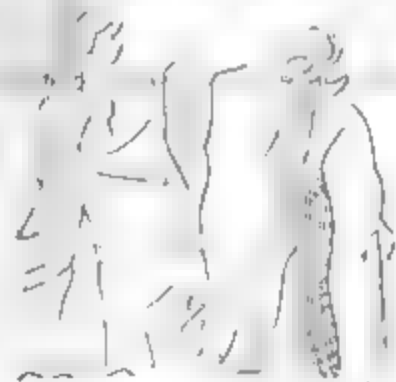
Although a practical knowledge of many herbal remedies, as well as some surgical knowledge, existed in ancient Mesopotamia, the causes (as we mean the word) of disease were not understood. They were often ascribed to the work of gods or of demons acting as the agents of gods for the punishment of sin. Particular demons were thought likely to cause specific diseases. Some of these were described as, for example, 'the hand of god', 'the hand of a ghost', 'the hand of Ishtar (Inana)', 'the hand

54 Within a reed shelter a priest ministers to a sick man, while a man and dog stand guard outside. From a cylinder seal of the Neo-Assyrian Period.

of Samas (Utu)', indicating the deity or demon thought responsible for them. The god or demon was said to 'seize' the victim. In art, a demon holds a man upside down, or a god tramples someone under foot. In a Neo-Assyrian prayer, a sufferer pleads forgiveness for his unwitting offence of a god or goddess 'whom I know or whom I do not know'. Such diseases were treated by the exorcist (see priests and priestesses). Some illnesses which we should regard as psychological were referred to as the work of demons; psychological illness could also be caused by sorcery (see magic and sorcery).

In some cases a distinction seems to have been made between such divine or demonically originating illness and more 'naturally' occurring conditions (although the causes were not known). For the treatment of the latter type of diseases a different priest was usually involved, who practised a primitive form of medicine. However, the functions of this general practitioner and the exorcist overlapped and were to some extent interchangeable. In the type of disease was unclear, both priests would be called in, and a common complaint was that neither had been able to effect a cure.

Collections of diagnostic omens give ceps-



55 Nergal, god of the underworld, instructs a demon in the punishment of a sinner, a rendering of security by disease. Detail from a cylinder seal of the Old Babylonian Period.

ously detailed descriptions of medical symptoms, with explanations and prognoses for the course of the disease. However, these also include, for instance, omens observed by the exorcist on his way to treat the patient at his house.

A degree of primitive surgery was known in Mesopotamia from a very early period. Among the skeletons from Shanidar Cave in the Zagros (dating from perhaps 60,000 to 45,000 years ago) was one of a forty-year-old man with an amputated right arm, the lower part of which had been successfully amputated before his death in a rock-fall.

Herbal and other mixtures concocted by the Babylonians included ingredients such as honey and syrup of dates, as well as varied and apparently secret substances. These potions were often given quaint names, such as 'Samas's remedy', 'pigeon droppings' or 'snake-sk n'. Other medicinal agents included warm and cold baths, the rubbing of oils into the body and blood letting. Mesopotamian measures of public health control included the use of parasites for shading from the sun and of fly whisks against insects, the provision of toilet and washing facilities and the construction of drains for the proper disposal of sewage, and in battle the use of large trenches for mass burial. Models of the liver, used for instruction in divination, were anatomically superior to later (five-lobed) medieval European models. One achievement of the Babylonians in the field of medicine was their recognition of the transmissibility of leprosy: sufferers were exiled from the community.

The laws of Hammurabi of Babylon regulating standards of professional conduct and fixing medical fees certainly suggest some sharp practice, but equally confirm the existence of a profession of medicine well attested throughout Mesopotamian history. This relates the claim of the Greek historian Herodotus in the fifth century BC that the Babylonians had no doctors.

See dogs, galla; 'hands-of-Ishtar'; Nergal. For gods and goddesses of healing, see Damiu, Gula; Ninisina.

## divination

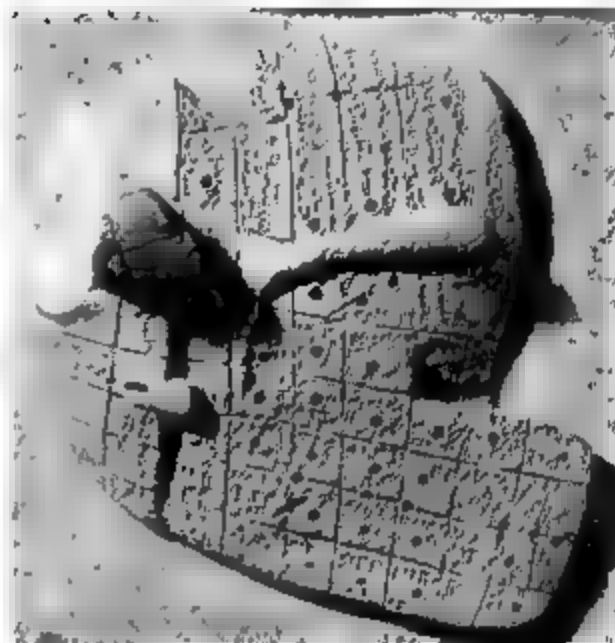
Divination was widely used in Mesopotamia. It is based on the idea that to some extent the future is pre-determined; but that the gods, especially Samas (Lelu) and Adad (Ikkur), have made available to man certain indications of the future (omens or portents) in the world around him, which can be interpreted (divined) by experts with specialist knowledge.

Some forms of divination required special rituals. Particularly important from Sumerian times was extispicy, in which the liver, lungs or colon spiral of a specially slaughtered young ram were inspected for peculiarities during a nocturnal rite. By the Old Babylonian Period, extispicy was highly developed and had a complex technical vocabulary. Also used were lecanimancy (in which the behaviour of oil on water was observed) and libanomancy (the behaviour of smoke from incense). Necromancy (calling up the spirits of the dead) was used only rarely and considered to be dangerous.

Other forms of divination involved the observation of chance natural occurrences and these forms gradually became more widespread. The study of celestial omens (astronomical and meteorological) came to surpass even extispicy in popularity and survived until after the end of Mesopotamian civilisation. Also important were teratological omens (from monstrous births among animals), terrestrial omens (from a whole range of everyday occurrences), hemerological and menological omens (based on the idea of favourable and unfavourable days), prognostic omens (predicting the course and outcome of diseases), physiognomic omens (from the appearance and behaviour of individual people), augury (the observation of birds, only in later periods) and oneiromancy (the interpretation of dreams), a branch of the subject with its own specialised practitioners.

Diviners had to be descendants of free men and perfect in body and limb. They were considered to be as important as physicians and practitioners of magic. Often they accompanied troops on campaign or were attached to

56 An anatomically detailed model in baked clay of a sheep's liver, probably of Old Babylonian date. It is covered with writing giving the prognostications derived from signs observed in the various parts of the organ, and was probably used as an aid in teaching divination.  
145 x 145 mm



the palace as state functionaries.

Divination could be used to control the behaviour of kings and important persons. Extispicy was resorted to by many ordinary people to investigate the future (often in connection with specific questions). Before military campaigns before building a temple, when appointing civil servants, in weather forecasting, to ensure the king's wellbeing and safety – and also on a much more homely level as a form of personal fortune-telling – divination played an important part in decision-making.

See astrology and astronomy; gidim, priests and priestesses; right and left, river ordeal.

## divine intervention

Although it is a commonplace of certain types of Sumerian religious literature that the mind of a god is inscrutable – like a sealed beer barrel, who knows what is going on inside – it was generally accepted that the gods did intervene in some extent in human life. The idea

of a god determining the 'destiny' or 'fate' (Sumerian *nam-lar*, Akkadian *fatum*) of an individual was more a settling of certain potentialities than an absolute predestination of the future. There were certain 'plans' or 'designs' behind the world, and it was up to gods, kings and humanity at large to do their part to ensure the harmonious functioning of civilisation. Human misfortune and diseases were often regarded as an indication of divine displeasure. Behind the theory of divination, which gradually became more and more complex, lay a desire to extract rather more specific information in advance about what gods had in store for mankind. In the myths and legends, gods and goddesses mingle with heroes and even mortals, giving them explicit advice (sometimes even involving them in their inter-divine disputes) and wielding supernatural power on their behalf. Rulers were careful to give credit, where due, to their divine protectors for assistance in battle. Offerings (see sacrifice and offering) accompanied by re-

quests or thanks, and parents' choices of names for their children, testify to a wide belief in the power and willingness of the gods to alter the course of individual human destinies. Indeed one can say that religious belief in ancient Mesopotamia would have had no meaning unless it was accompanied by at least the possibility of divine intervention in mortals' affairs.

See dreams and visions

## dogs

The sitting dog first occurs as a divine symbol in the Old Babylonian Period and continues through to the Neo-Babylonian. Inscriptions on *kuššurus* identify it as the symbol of *Gula*, goddess of healing. An Old Babylonian dog figurine from Garsu (modern Tellu) is dedicated (see dedication) to *Šimuna* (*Gula*) and many dog figurines were discovered in the temple of *Gula* at Isin, confirming that the association dates back to that time. That it continued down to the Neo-Babylonian Period is shown by another figurine from Sippar dedicated to *Meme* (another name for *Gula*), while King *Nebuchadnezzar II* (reigned 604-562 BC) records the placing of statues of gold, silver and bronze dogs as deposits in the gates of *Gula's* temple at Babylon. A dog is commonly seen on seal designs of this period, sometimes sitting by an enthroned goddess, presumably *Gula*, but also sometimes without the goddess, sitting and supporting the symbol of the crook.



57. Five little clay models of dogs. They had been placed in a hollow at the base of a monumental stone relief on one side of a doorway in the royal palace of the Assyrian king *Ashurbanipal* (reigned 668-627 BC) at Nineveh. They are painted in different colours and inscribed in exact conformity to the prescription of written rituals, which denote their purpose as one of protective magic. Hts. 45-50 mm.

In the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods the dog sitting or standing was also used as a magically protective figure, not attached specifically to any individual deity. Groups of five clay figurines of dogs painted different colours were prescribed as foundation deposits for either side of a gateway. They were inscribed with such gems as 'Don't stop to think, but!' Bronze dog figurines are in the same period usually found in groups of seven (see numbers). Whether they were magically protective or dedicatory or served some other purpose is unclear.

It has been suggested that the disease of rabies was present in Mesopotamia by the beginning of the second millennium BC and more widespread during the first millennium BC.

The dog family to the Mesopotamians meant not only wolves, hyenas, jackals and dogs, but also lions.

donkey: see *Lamastu*.

## donkey ears

Mesopotamian demons and monsters with lion's heads were very often depicted also with long upright ears, probably those of a donkey. The lion-dragon is shown with such ears from the time of its invention in the Akkadian Period. The lion-demon is depicted with leonine ears in the Akkadian Period, but thereafter also acquires the upright ears. The evil

goddess *Lamastu* also has such ears when she is represented for the first millennium BC. Her special beast is the donkey. When such creatures were represented in art in Mesopotamia they were generally altered to those of a lion, as a protective example of lack of understanding of the Mesopotamian convention. However, in Greek art the animal remained a dog-eared and horse-passed into the modern griffin, chimera and modern European griffins and dragons.

The inclusion of an element of the swift-footed wild ass along with aspects of the fierce lion in such demonic hybrids might have seemed an appropriate combination of wild animals, but the griffin also have bird talons (see bird talons and wings).

See griffin; standards, staves and sceptres of the gods

## dragons

Dragon (Greek *drakon*, 'serpent') is the word usually used in English for a terrifying mythical monster with a snake-like or lizard-like body. Belief in such creatures arose in antiquity with at any knowledge of the monstrous reptiles and birds that had actually existed. The griffin, for instance, Mesopotamian art includes a number of such dragon-like creatures of indecisive and beneficent nature. Most closely corresponding to the general image is the so-called snake-dragon, but other hybrid creatures as the lion-dragon might also be regarded as dragon-like images.

In Sumerian poetry, *ušumgal*, a serpentine monster, can be a metaphor for a god or king; it is a term of praise and not necessarily evil or unpleasant.

See demons and monsters

## dreams and visions

Since *Enlil* and his successors in psychomancy, dreams have usually been regarded as the direct or more oblique references of the subconscious mind to events of the immediate or more distant past. Throughout antiquity, however, and indeed until the late nineteenth century AD, dreams were normally regarded as

portents of future events, and thus were studied as a branch of divination.

The importance attached to dreams can be seen, for example, in the number of dream episodes related in the stories of *Enlil*. In both the Sumerian and Akkadian versions, here they are used as a literary device to open a window upon subsequent events and, by their consequent effects upon the protagonists, as a catalyst for moving the story on. In the Sumerian Babylonian version of the epic, *Enlil* has two dreams presaging, through symbolism, the arrival of *Enkidu* (see *Ninkun*). He has a series of three dreams concerning the projected campaign against *Humbaba* (*Huwawa*). Then there is *Enkidu's* 'death-dream' and a dream of *Utnapishtim* (*Ziusura*). For *Enkidu's* 'death-dream', the Hittite version apparently substituted a dream of his joining the assembly of the gods. The Akkadian version of the epic also recounts a dream of *Enlil* presaging his struggle with the *Hull of Heaven*.

As a means of glimpsing the future, rulers took their dreams very seriously. Sudea, ruler of Lagash, recounts a dream in which he was instructed to rebuild the temple of *Ninkinnu*. The Assyrian king *Ashurbanipal* (reigned 668-627 BC), when apparently in a desperate military position, told of a dream in which the goddess *Istar* (*Inanna*) appeared to encourage him and to assure him that she would defeat the enemy on his behalf. The appearance of the goddess before the king was also seen in a dream of a priest of *Istar's* temple. No dream episodes are related in the Assyrian royal annals before *Ashurbanipal's* reign. Yet it seems that their portents were earlier considered significant, because at *Imur-Enlil* (modern Balawat) *Assurnasirpal II* (reigned 883-859 BC) had built a temple to *Mammu*, possibly identical with the god of dreams. Archaeological excavations have unearthed a set of doors of the temple, which were decorated with bands of bronze depicting scenes from the king's campaigns. (Other similar sets of doors, of *Assurnasirpal* and his son and successor *Shalmaneser III*, were found in the neighbouring palaces.) *Imur-Enlil* was close

in the capital city Kishu (modern Nimrud), and may have been the usual place of the first night's rest at the start of a campaign. Here we guess, the king would hope for dreams portending the outcome of the coming battles. From another site (ancient Hazratna, in Turkey) we have a fragment of a poem, rather in the epic style, which relates a dream of Shalmaneser III (reigned 858-824 BC) about the course of one of his campaigns.

If they were related in some way to the revelation of future events, dreams could also be a means of seeing into other worlds. Since death is the future for all men, there were dreams of the afterlife. Enkidu's death-dream is an example. There is also an account of a dream of an Assyrian prince (thought by some to be Assurbanipal at a time before he became king) in which he visits the underworld and contemplates the horrors of the demonic creatures residing there. That Enkidu was able to have a dream of the gods, resolving his fate, shows that heaven as well as hell could be seen through dreams.

A compilation of dream omens has survived. In it are collected a host of dream scenarios, together with prognostications. The predictions seem to be based upon precedent. That is to say that the recorded subjects of the dreams represent actual dreams reported by individuals, while the prognostications record the events that subsequently took place in the lives of the respective dreamers. Occasionally alternative predictions are offered, presumably based upon the reports of similar dreams with differing sequels. The array of dream subjects listed is itself of interest: they include episodes of daily work, of journeys near and far, of family matters and sexual acts, encounters with other people, animals and deities.

There were specialised dream-interpreters (see *priests* and *priestesses*).

See *Gutumdug*; *Geshinana*; *Nanše*; 'plant of life'.

## Du-ku

In Sumerian mythology, the Du-ku ('holy hill' or 'holy mound') is a cosmic locality

situated 'on the mountain of heaven and earth'. It is where the gods determined the destinies, and has therefore been interpreted as a 'world mountain' where the Anuna gods lived in primordial times and where elements of human culture (agriculture, animal husbandry, weaving etc.) first came into being. It is described as the home of sheep and grain, and is punningly referred to as the 'holy lap' (*du ku*) of Enlil. An alternative interpretation sees it, more prosaically, as the foothills of the Zagros mountains, whose fertile climate may in a very real sense have contributed to the development of human civilisation. Most likely the phrase 'mountain of heaven and earth' is intended to imply the world at the time before heaven and earth were separated from each other (see *cosmology*).

Du-ku was also the name of shrines at *Girsu*, *Nippur* and *Eridu*, earthly counterparts of the cosmic Du-ku.

## Dumuzi

The god Dumuzi is a shepherd god. In a disputation with Enkimdu, the god of irrigation and cultivation, Dumuzi represents the conflicting interests of the pastoralist. When Inanna visits the underworld, and cannot return without a substitute to take her place, demons come to fetch her beloved young husband Dumuzi to replace her. In this way Dumuzi died and became a god of the underworld. In the Sacred Marriage, in which Sumerian kings were ritually married to Inanna, the king was identified with Dumuzi. In another tradition, Dumuzi and Ningizzida are represented as the gatekeepers of the Heaven of Anu (An).

The early history of the various local cults of Dumuzi and related deities is complex and bewildering. The Dumuzi worshipped at Bad-tibira was later thought to have been an antediluvian king of the town (described as a shepherd). The Dumuzi worshipped at Uruk as the husband of Inanna was connected with nearby Kuara and was also, on one account, thought to have been an early king of Uruk. The god Ama-usumgal-ana, later identified with

Dumuzi, was originally worshipped at a village near Lagash and in one cult song is described as a warrior hero. In some Sumerian poetry, Dumuzi is referred to as 'my Dumuzi'.

Tammuz, mentioned in the Biblical book of Ezekiel (8:14), is a Hebrew form of the name.

Referred to as the death of Dumuzi seems to have been widespread. In Early Dynastic Lagash the sixth month of the year was named after the festival of Dumuzi, and in a Later South Mesopotamian calendar one of the months is called Dumuzi. The fourth month of the standard Babylonian calendar was called *Dumuzi* or *Dumuzi*, and *Tammuz* is still used in Iraqi Arabic as the name for July.

The god Dumuzi and the stories concerning him do not seem to be depicted in Mesopotamian art.

See *dead gods*; *Gula*; *Geshinana*; stylised tree and its 'rituals'.

## Dumuzi-zu-abzu

A local goddess of the village Kishu near Lagash. Although her name (which possibly means 'young child of the abzu') was sometimes abbreviated to Dumuzi-zu, she has no obvious connection with the god Dumuzi.

Dumuzi see *Geshinana*.

## dwarf

Persons of arrested growth have on many occasions been the butt of humour, often employed as entertainers and fools. We know that dwarfs were kept as curiosities in Egyptian households. For Mesopotamia there is no evidence of such a practice, but on southern Mesopotamian

58 The house of a dwarf as depicted in a seal of the Neo-Babylonian Period.



seals of the nineteenth century BC a dwarfish figure with bow legs is a common motif. It has variously been interpreted as a dancer in rituals or entertainments, or as a type of demon, perhaps a prankster or a protective spirit. The figure may be related to the grotesque Egyptian dwarf god Bes, whose form was known in Mesopotamia and other areas of the ancient Near East.

See *Enki*.

## F-abzu

F-abzu ('Abzu House') was the temple of Enki at Eridu. According to Sumerian tradition, Eridu was the first city and the F-abzu the oldest shrine. Excavations conducted at the site, Abu Shahrain in southern Iraq, have uncovered a long sequence of superimposed temples beginning probably in the fifth millennium BC and demonstrating gradual elaboration of temple construction.

See *temples and temple architecture*.

## F-ana

F-ana ('House of Heaven') is the name given to the temple at Uruk dedicated to the goddess Inanna. The city had been built, according to tradition, by the Seven Sages and Gilgamesh. The temenos or sacred enclosure of F-ana, as known from excavations, was constructed over a long period of time by a number of different rulers, including Ur-Nammu (reigned 2168-2150 BC), first king of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Subsequently, Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Persian rulers (including Cyrus and Darius) had building programmes in this area.

See *sacrifice and offering*, *temples and temple architecture*.

ear of corn: see *barley stalk*.

earth: see *An*.

E-gal-mah: see *Gula*.

## Egyptian gods and symbols

Egyptian religious concepts and the pantheon seem to have penetrated Mesopotamian culture remarkably little given the geographical proximity. Egyptian ideas about death and the afterlife, cosmology and the nature and form of the gods (in Egypt often in animal form) were so alien to Mesopotamian concepts that they could not easily be assimilated, nor did political or cultural circumstances ever require such assimilation. Of Egyptian gods, only the dwarf god Bes – or at least his physical form – was adopted widely throughout the ancient Near East.

The symbol of the winged disc derives originally, in all probability from Egypt but appears to have arrived in Mesopotamia indirectly, and to have been assimilated because of its close similarity to the pre-existing solar disc.

Only two other Egyptian symbols appear before the Neo-Assyrian Period. The *djed*-pillar, Egyptian sign for 'duration' is found on a few Syrian cylinder seals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries BC. The motif appears to be used as a decorative element, devoid of its original meaning.

More common on Syrian seals from about 1800 BC onwards, but very rare in Mesopotamia proper, is the *ankh* symbol, in Egypt the emblem of life. Usually it is used as a 'filling motif', but it can be carried by a goddess, or

used in sequence to create a composite element, such as an arch composed of rows of *ankhs*, in a superficially Egyptian but inauthentic style.

In the ninth to seventh centuries BC, the Assyrian aristocracy seems to have cultivated some taste for Egyptian art-work, and palaces might contain furniture carved, paneled or inlaid with Egyptian or Egyptianising designs.

E-*kaš-nu-paš* see Nanna-Suen.

E-*kur*

The E-*kur* ('Mountain House' see *kur*) was the name of Enki's temple at Nippur, also incorporating the E-*ki-ur* (the shrine of Ninlil). According to a Sumerian poem, it was founded and built by the god Enki himself. The E-*kur* was sometimes described as having a cosmological rôle as the 'mooring-rope' of heaven and earth. Adjacent to it stood the ziggurat Dur-an-ki ('Bond of heaven and earth' see cosmology), which was originally built by Lir-Namma (reigned 2868–2828 BC), founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur. It is described in some detail in a hymn from the reign of Ur-Nammu, in which the mythological scenes on its gates are enumerated. Imduktu kills a lion, while an eagle seizes a strongman.

See assembly of the gods; Nungal, snake gods, temples and temple architecture.

Elamite gods

A number of gods belonging to the pantheon of Elam, a country lying to the south east of Babylonia (in modern Iran), are mentioned in Mesopotamian texts. These include:

Pilenenkar, later called Kurisra ('Great Goddess'), a mother goddess.

Humban, later called Napirisa ('Great God'), a sky god (see Huwawa).

Hutran, son of Kurisra and Napirisa.

Inšušinak, god of the city of Susa, later a god of the underworld.

Laganat and Imekarab, goddesses, judges of the dead.

Nahhunte, sun god and god of justice.

Rohurater, Kishšapir, Tirtir, local gods.

Napir (?) moon god.

Narām, Narunt, Nārziina, goddesses and sisters of Kurisra, also called sisters of the Sešnu (the Seven (gods)).

Šamut, a herald god, and his wife Manzāt (see *raḥḥu*).

Most of the Mesopotamian gods were also honoured in Elam.

E-*mah* see Ninkursaga, Šara.

E-*meslam* see Nergal.

E-*meš-urag* see Zababa.

Enbilu see Enkimdu.

Enki see abzu, Enki's creatures.

E-*namu* see Ningirsu.

Enki-Ea

Enki (Akkadian Ea) was god of the subterranean freshwater ocean (abzu), and was especially associated with wisdom, magic and incantations, as with the arts and crafts of civilization. He is sometimes called by the

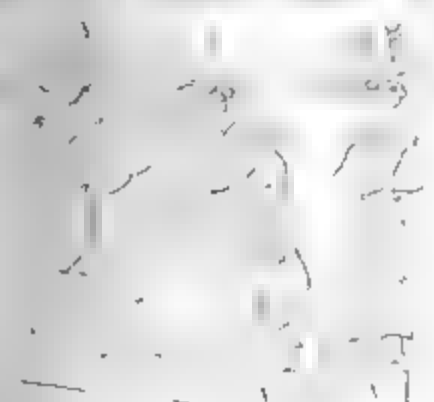
names Nudimmud or Ninsiku or by the title 'Stag of the abzu', i.e. the giant fallow deer *Dama dama mesopotamica*. Enki-Ea was a son of An-Anu, or else of the goddess Nammu, and a twin brother of the god Eškur-Adad. His wife was Damgalnuna (Damkina), and their offspring included the gods Marduk, Asarluhi, Eabulu, the sage Adapa and the goddess Nanle. His minister was the two-faced god Isimud (Lamtu). This Enki (whose name is Enki in full) is not the same as Enki's ancestor Enki ('Lord Earth').

Enki's most important cult centre was the E-abzu ('Abzu House') at Eridu. As a provider of fresh water and a creator god (see creation) and determiner of destinies, Enki was always seen as favourable to mankind. In the epic of Atrahasis and Gilgamesh, especially, he takes the part of man against the gods and helps mankind to escape the Flood sent by the decision of the other gods. In the Sumerian poem 'Inanna and Enki' he controls the me concerned with every aspect of human life, and in 'Enki and the World Order' he has the rôle of organising in detail every feature of the civilized world.

In art Enki is represented as a seated god with long beard, wearing a cap with many horns and a long, pleated robe. Streams of water flow from his arms to the ground, sometimes with little fish swimming along the flow. Often the god is shown receiving worshippers or bearers of offerings, or else he receives the bird-man, brought before him as a prisoner under guard, or the lion-demon. These might be introduced by other gods, most commonly by Enki's minister Isimud. Sometimes Enki is shown seated within a structure, the *abzu*, or else his E-abzu shrine, surrounded by channels of water.

In the symbolism of the Kassite, Babylonian and Assyrian Periods, Ea's beast was the goat-fish. The god's other symbols were a curved stick terminating in a ram's head (see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods) and a turtle.

See Enki's creatures; horned cap, Ninkursaga; ring-post; river ordeal; wedge.



60 The water god Ea and his two-faced minister god Isimud. Detail from the cylinder seal of a wife named Adda, Akkadian Period.

59 The Egyptian symbols *ankh* and *djed*, as known from the designs of some Syrian seals.



## Enkidu

In Sumerian poems, Enkidu is usually the servant and fellow-traveller of Gilgamesh. In the Akkadian epic he is the hero's friend and equal companion.

For the tales of his life, exploits and death, and for representations in art, see Gilgamesh.

See afterlife, Bull of Heaven; Huwawa; underworld.

## Enkimdu

The god Enkimdu is 'lord of dike and canal' or, in the disputation between him and the shepherd god Dumuzi, 'of dike, canal and furrow, cultivator'. A son of Enki, he is closely identified with the god Enbilulu, the 'canal inspector', regarded as a form of Adad (Iskur) or in the Babylonian Epic of Creation, as one of the names of Marduk. A third god, Ennugi is also 'lord of dike and canal' and 'canal inspector of the great gods', but has extra associations with the underworld.

## Enki's creatures

As well as by his minister Isimud, the god Enki is served by a number of creatures who inhabit the watery depths of the abzu. First come the *enkum* (male) and *ninkum* (female). Enki sends them after Inanna's boat when he realises that she has stolen the me from him. Next are the 'fifty giants of Eridu' then the 'fifty lahuma of the engur' (*Engur* is a synonym of *abzu*). In the poem 'The Cursing of Agade' the *lahuma* are protective figures standing in the great gateway of a temple. Then come the 'great fishes ...' and the 'guardians of Eruk', difficult to understand in the context of Enki and Eridu. Finally in the hymn addressed to the temple of Asarluku at Kuara, the 'seven *abgal* (Seven Sages) are also included.

The terms *enkum* and *ninkum* are also the names of temple dignitaries at Eridu, punitive priests on the temple staff. Similarly *abgal* is also the name of a temple official among the clergy of Eridu.

In the Sumerian poem 'Enki and Ninmah' another group of creatures, the *sig-en-sig-du*, help Ninmah to create mankind by preparing

pieces of clay from 'above the alka' (see *creation*).

## Enlil (Ellil)

Enlil (Akkadian Ellil) is one of the most important gods in the Mesopotamian pantheon. According to one Sumerian poem, the other gods might not even look upon his splendour. Sometimes he is said to be the offspring of An, and brother of the goddess Annu (see mother goddesses and birth goddesses). He is also described as a descendant of Enki and Nink ('Lord and Lady Earth'), not connected with the god Enki. His wife is Ninlil (or Sud). Among the children of Enlil are the goddess Inanna and the gods Adad (Iskur), Nanna-Suen, Nergal, Ninurta, Ningirsu, Pabilsag, Nusku, Utu (Samas), Uruk, Zababa and Ennugi. Nusku is Enlil's minister.

The great centre of the cult of Enlil was the temple E-kur (the 'Mountain House') at Nippur, at the northern edge of Sumer, and Enlil is often called the Great Mountain and King of the Foreign Lands, which may suggest a connection with the Zagros mountains. Other images used to describe his personality are king, supreme lord, father and creator, raging storm and wild bull and interweaver/merchant. He is also called sometimes by the name Naramur. Although he is in one text referred to as East Wind and North Wind, there is no evidence to connect the name Ellil with the *lila lila* or desert wind demon (see *lilitu*). The Kassites worshipped Ellil at their capital Dur-Kurigalzu (modern 'Aqar Quf').

Astrologically, Ellil was associated with the constellation Bootes.

In Neo-Assyrian art Ellil is symbolised by a horned cap.

See Akkur; Nusku; snake-dragon; tablet of destinies.

## Enmesarra

Enmesarra is a god connected with the underworld. The *usium* is a type of precinct, was associated with him. Seven (or sometimes eight) minor deities were regarded as his children.

In an incantation Enmesarra and Ninmesarra, his female counterpart, are described as ancestors of the god Enlil, and they were apparently regarded as primeval deities.

See Seven (gods)

## Ennugi

Ennugi is the god who has special care over dikes and canals, and he is called the 'canal inspector' of the great gods. He is regarded as a son of Enlil, or else of Enmesarra; and his wife is the goddess Nanihgal. He may be identical to Gugal-ana, first husband of Ereshkigal.

He is also associated with the underworld.

See Enkimdu

## Enzag

Enzag is one of the gods created by the union of Enki and Ninhursag. In the Sumerian poem Enki and Ninhursag, Enki has eaten eight plants which grew from his semen spilt on the thighs of his daughter Uttu, and has become ill in various parts of his body. As a result of their union, Ninhursag gives birth one after another to eight deities. One of these is Enzag, lord of Dilmun. In a later text Enzag is called the 'Nahu of Dilmun'.

See Dilmunite gods

## Ereshkigal

Ereshkigal, whose name can be translated 'Queen of the Great Below', is also known in Akkadian as Allatu. She is the goddess who rules the underworld, mother of the goddess Ninkal and, by Enlil, of the god Nannur, who serves as her messenger and minister. Ereshkigal's first husband was the god Gugal-ana, whose name probably originally means 'canal inspector of An' and who may therefore have been identical with Ennugi. In the Sumerian poem 'Inanna's Descent to the Underworld', Inanna tries to gain entry to the underworld by claiming that she has come to attend the funeral rites of Gugal-ana, the 'husband of my elder sister Ereshkigal'. The son of Ereshkigal and Gugal-ana was the god Ninkasi. In another tradition, Ereshkigal married the god Nergal, as related in the poem 'Nergal and Ereshkigal'.

Ereshkigal lived in a palace located at Gansir, the doorway to the underworld, protected by seven gates, all of which could be bolted and each of which was guarded by a porter.

See Girsuana

## Eridu

Eridu was a city on the south-western edge of Mesopotamia, sacred to the god Enki, and believed by the Sumerians to be the first city, and to be at least 250,000 years old. Excavations have revealed that the site (now called Abu Shahram) is very ancient indeed, but in historical times Eridu consisted of little more than the temple buildings and sacred precinct. Originally the marshes came close to Eridu, and fish offerings were regularly made to the god (see *sacrifice and offering*). The temple of Enki, known as the E-abzu ('Abzu House') or E-engura ('House of the engur' (another word for *abzu*)), was an extremely important shrine, which was ritually 'visited' (see *Journeys and processions of the gods*) by other gods travelling in their boats (see *boats of the gods*). Its gates were guarded in Sumerian times by two great stone lions, one of which was excavated almost intact and now stands in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad.

Sometimes in incantation rituals (see *magic and sorcery*), the magician is told 'Now you cast the Spell of Eridu' although we never learn what the Spell of Eridu was – possibly it was a secret formula that was transmitted orally. Enki, of course, was closely involved with magic.

See Adapa; altars; Seven Sages; temples and temple architecture.

Erra: see Nergal

Erua: see Sarpanitu

## Esagil

Esagil, the 'Luth House', is the name of the temple of Marduk at Babylon. It stood on the Processional Way adjacent to a very large enclosure incorporating the ziggurat Etemen-an-ki (see *Tower of Babel*), with

shrines dedicated to a number of gods. The principal shrines were those of Marduk and his wife Sarpanitu. The temple precinct measured about 500 metres square. Esagi was already in existence in Old Babylonian times but was considerably rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar II (reigned 604-562 BC). The incredible wealth of the temple was mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus, who described Babylon in the fifth century BC. The ziggurat was in ruins by the time of Alexander the Great, but he died at Babylon before he could rebuild it.

Sometimes in the cult of Marduk, Esagi was accorded cosmic significance as the 'mooring post of heaven and earth'. It is represented in this way in the Babylonian Epic of Creation, where the creation of Esagi itself is an important stage in Marduk's arrangement of the world.

See temples and temple architecture

E-tu-me-ka: see Ninuria

## Etana

According to the Sumerian King List, after the Flood, hegemony over Sumer fell to the city of Kish and the kings of its First Dynasty. One of these kings was named Etana, 'a shepherd who ascended to heaven'.

What could or easily have been a far-distant hunt as a story is fortunately filled out for us by Babylonian poems recording the legend. The tale begins as a fable: 'The serpent and the eagle

lived peacefully together in a tree, until one day the eagle gobbed up the serpent's young. The serpent went crying to Samas (Utu) who suggested a course of action. Concealed in the back of a dead ox, the serpent lay in wait for the eagle to come to eat from the carcass. He then wrought a terrible revenge, catching the bird, breaking his 'heel', plucking him and hurling him into a deep pit.

Etana meanwhile had his own problems. Being childless, he was in search of the plant of giving birth (a fertility drug) which grew only in the heavens (see 'plant of life'). Samas counselled him to rescue and befriend the eagle and to make use of him in flight. Etana followed this advice and the eagle carried him on his back, soaring the skies. As the earth began to disappear from view, Etana lost his nerve. On this cliffhanger the extant text becomes fragmentary. We may assume, perhaps, that Etana was rescued and probably that he acquired the fertility plant. According to the Sumerian King List, he lived a respectable 2,560 years and had a son and successor named Halib.

Cylinder seals especially of the Akkadian Period commonly depict scenes of a man riding on the back of an eagle, which may plausibly be interpreted as representations of a version of Etana's well-known journey.

See Gilgamesh

E-tenu-an-ki: see Tower of Babel

etenu: see gidim

extispicy: see divination

## eye and eye-idols

The image of an eye was always a powerful amulet in Mesopotamia. In the precincts of the so-called 'Eye Temple' at Tell Brak in north-eastern Syria, dated to the Late Uruk Period, excavators have found thousands of little 'eye-idols', schematised humanoid figures fashioned from alabaster, limestone, soapstone and black burnished clay. In their most simple form they have a flat body with an elongated



62 A selection of various eye idols from the early historic Eye Temple at Tell Brak (1600-1300 BC)



61 The legendary King Etana of Kish riding the eagle. Detail from a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period

neck supporting a pair of wide eyes, infilled with black or green paint. Some examples have three eyes, or two pairs of eyes, one above the other. It has been suggested that the temple was dedicated to an eye god, whose image would originally have stood upon the pedestal in the shrine. Occasionally these idols are represented as 'embracing' a child, so that an alternative view would prefer to see them as offerings to an all-seeing mother goddess.

An emphasis on the eyes, however, seems to have been a more general sign of extreme 'holiness', for statuettes deposited in the shrine of a Sumerian temple at Ešnunna (the so-called Square Temple), surely representing worshippers rather than gods, look with abnormally large eyes and wide stares as if into some other world.

The eye is a recurrent motif in art from the Early Dynastic to the Neo-Assyrian Period, although it is not easy to decide when it had a purely decorative and when a magical function. In the case of eye-shaped amulets and pendants, religious overtones are more certainly apparent.

See rhinib.

#### 'eyes-of-Ningal'

Models of eyes cut in semi-precious stones are known from Sumerian down to Neo-Assyrian times. These include a pair of eyes carved from a lump of nryx and dedicated by an early king of Babylon to the goddess Ningal (see dedication). This item was later plundered by the Assyrians and rededicated to the same goddess. In Assyria, some ten centuries later. Because other models of eyes were dedicated to this deity, they are generally referred to by archaeologists as 'eyes-of-Ningal', but such models were also dedicated to other deities.

#### Ezida

Ezida (probably 'Righteous House') is the name of temples of the god Nabû. Originally the name referred to the temple at Borsippa, just south of Babylon, where Nabû was worshipped from the Old Babylonian Period. It was from this temple that Nabû came to 'visit

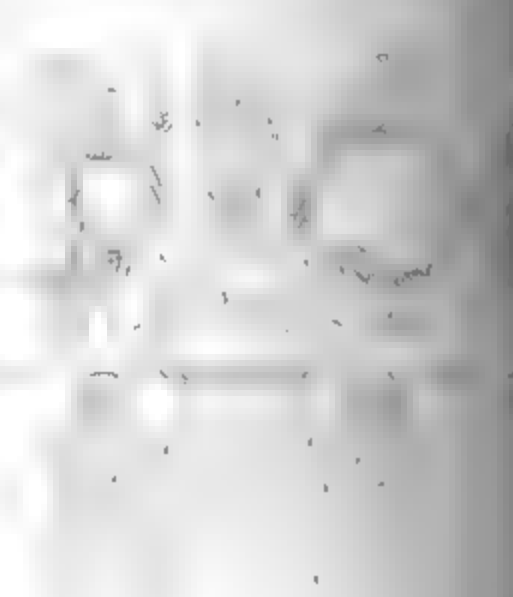
his father Marduk during the annual Babylonian New Year ceremonies. When Nabû was adopted as a popular god in Assyria also, a temple to him was built on the acropolis of the Assyrian royal capital Kalhu (modern Nimrud). It is known that the Assyrian king Asurnasirpal II refounded this Ezida in 879 BC. An extensive library of cuneiform tablets was kept in the Ezida at Kalhu, in a room across the courtyard from the twin shrines of Nabû and his wife Tasmetu.

See temples and temple architecture

tan. see Bau

#### fertility

Although the all-embracing 'fertility cult' aspects of Mesopotamian myth and religion have certainly been exaggerated as a result of



63 A fertility god, from a monumental stone relief discovered next to a well within the temple of the god Ašur in the city of Ašur. Probably it dates to the second half of the second millennium BC. H. 1.30 m.

the anthropological climate of the 1930s and 1940s, when there was a tendency to see fertility rites in almost every aspect of ancient (and 'primitive' modern) religions, there is no doubt that agriculture and the productivity of the land was of fundamental importance in much of Mesopotamian life, and that this was reflected by religious belief and ritual. This is well demonstrated by the importance placed on the cult of Dumuzi, and particularly by the place given to water symbolism with such re-

current motifs as the vase with streams and certain agricultural elements such as the fan of Barley stalk, plough and spade (symbol). The abundance of the land was thought to be dependent upon the wellbeing of the gods and upon the life and health of the ruler. Neo-Assyrian prayers and incantations for the life of the king make clear a belief in a causal connection between the ruler's personal health and the wellbeing of the state, including the condition of agriculture. The ritual for the subincense king and queen (see human sacrifice) was intended to save the life of the king and probably, thereby, that of the whole community. Human sexual intercourse is depicted, mostly on baked clay plaques and model beds of the late Taurus Old Babylonian Period and in Neo-Assyrian lead figurines from the temple of Ishtar (Inanna) at Ašur. The latter appear to show intercourse taking place on an altar (see prostitution and ritual sex).

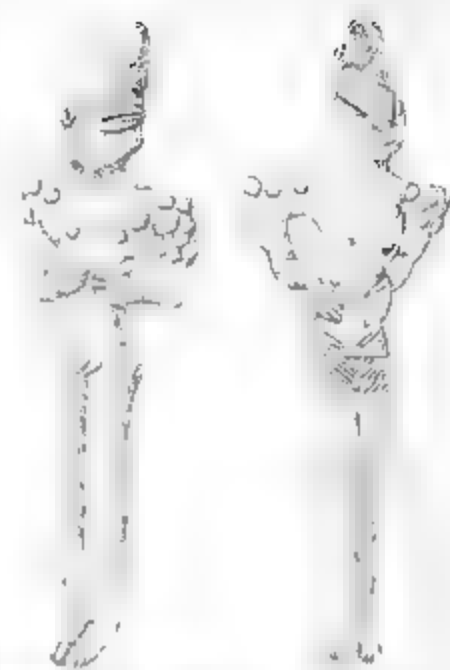
The Sacred Marriage seems to have been a rite related to this.

See mother goddesses and birth goddesses, nude woman, Sarda.

'Figure with Mace' see mace

#### figurines

Figurines or statuettes (including plaques) were made in almost every period of ancient Mesopotamia. Most of those that survive are of clay but there are also examples of stone and metal (including gold, silver and copper or bronze), while incantations and descriptions of rituals refer to the fashioning of figurines also of perishable materials, such as wood (except



64 Ur III Period (third millennium BC), male and female baked clay figurines, from Eridu and Ur respectively. Hts. 177, 152 mm.

ally tamarisk), dough (see flour), bitumen and wax.

No single purpose can be ascribed to the use of figurines. Some of the human and animal figures may possibly have been children's toys. When found in graves they may sometimes serve as attendants upon the dead, substitutes for human and animal victims (see animal sacrifice, human sacrifice). Others again were dedicated to gods (see dedication): in all probability human figures normally represented the worshippers, while figures of gods and animals (such as the statuettes of dogs found in the temple of Gula at Isin) symbolised the deities concerned (see beasts of the gods). It is sometimes unclear whether anthropomorphic figures represented deities or persons, as with figures of the nude woman. Human figurines fashioned of dough or wax were used to

represent the witch in rituals to counteract sorcery. These figurines were destroyed as part of the rites (see magic and sorcery).

The Neo-Sumerian metal figures of 'basket-bearers' are thought to represent the ruler engaged in ritual labour in connection with a new building. In a different type of building ritual of the Neo-Assyrian Period, magically protective figurines of clay and wood represented various minor gods and beneficent demons and monsters. These were buried or placed in the rooms. In many of these cases, the efficacy of the figurines depended upon the supposed localisation of the power of a supernatural being within the figurine itself (a parallel to the procedure concerning the preparation of cult statues).

Certain figurines and plaques had very specific functions in particular rituals. Among these were those used to exorcise Lamashtu. Others were used to restore potency, possibly including the scenes of sexual intercourse and the models of human sexual organs, the latter particularly associated with the cult of Ištar (Inanna) (see prostitution and ritual sex). Models of other parts of the body, such as feet, are also known, and were possibly offerings made in connection with specific ailments.

See creation; eye and eye-idols; fish-garbed figure; figur; 'hands of Ištar'; Huwawa; magic circle; mother goddesses and birth goddesses; wretches

#### 'filling motifs'

The various smaller figures, animals, symbols and other elements found surrounding the principal scenes in Mesopotamian art, especially on seals, are generally referred to as 'fillers' or 'filling motifs'. Certain scholars, however, regard this term as inappropriate: the combinations of such elements, they believe, are almost always deliberate and have a magical, thematic and iconographic relevance to the figurations of the main scene.

See, for example: fish; fly

line' see Gishil; Išum; magic and sorcery; Ninku

#### fish

Fish offerings were made in Mesopotamia from early times (see sacrifice and offering). The fresh water of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which was believed to well up from the abzu, teems with fish, mostly species of carp, and it was natural for the fish to become associated with the water god Enki. Since he was a wise god, the fish also symbolised wisdom.

On seals, especially of Old Babylonian date, the image of the fish is often placed (as a so-called 'filling motif') close to figures and elements of ill omen for mankind, such as gods and demons attacking men. It may be that in such contexts the fish was intended to give a certain balance, as a sign of beneficence, to malevolent forces. Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals show fish offerings on tables, perhaps altars.

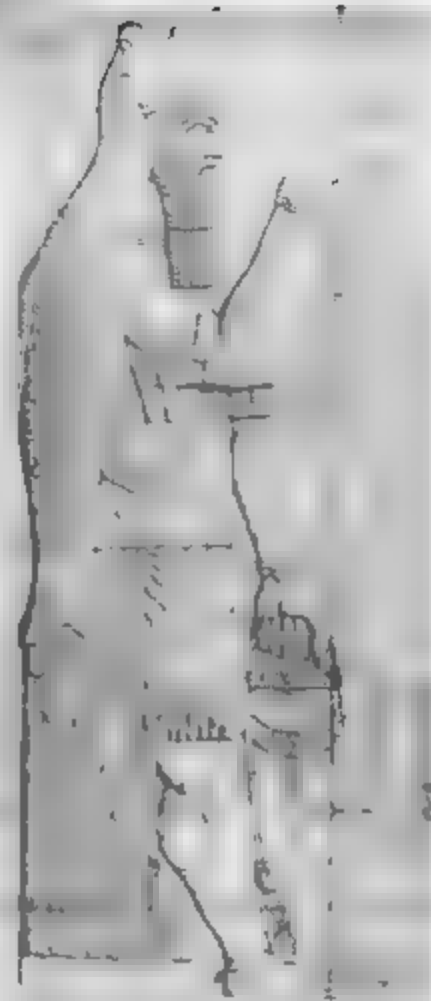
When the Assyrian king Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 BC) made an offering to Ea (Enki) of a golden boat, he also cast into the sea a pair of objects of gold, one of which was the model of a fish.

See fish-garbed figure; goat-fish; lion-fish; merman and mermaid; vase with streams

#### fish-garbed figure

The term is used to refer to a bearded human-bodied figure with, above the human face, a fish-head drawn over the scalp, and the full body of a fish hanging down the back, complete with caudal and dorsal fins. The type first occurs in the art of the Kassite Period, after which it passed to Assyria, becoming popular in the art of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods. From Assyrian palace sculpture the figure was copied in the early Persian Period. A similar figure, perhaps the Channes of Hierosolais, was known in Seleucid times. In the fourteenth to tenth centuries BC, the figure was depicted with a fish skin reaching to the ground. In the ninth century this was shortened to a cape terminating in a fish-tail just below the man's waist. From the eighth century, however, there was a reversion to the longer form.

From representations on magical plaques,



64 A human-looking figure dressed in the skin of a fish and holding a bucket and tongs, a cone. Drawn from a monumental stone relief, one of a pair flanking a doorway of the temple of the god Ninurta at the Assyrian city of Kalhu (modern Nimrud), where they had been erected during the reign of King Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC). Drawn by the author. See Austen Henry Layard, who conducted excavations at the site in the mid-19th century.

where a pair of fish-garbed figures is shown flanking the bed of a sick man, the figures of this type have been interpreted by some as exorcist priests, dressed in the bodies of fish or in costumes imitative of them (see animal skins). The presence of the type at doorways in Assyrian palace and temple sculpture, however, demonstrates the magically protective nature of the figure. So does the discovery of figurines of the creature buried under the floors of buildings. Texts concerning the rituals for making such images and placing them about the house identify the type as a form of *apkallu* 'sage'. The rituals prescribe figurines of this type to be buried in groups of seven (see numbers); those examples that have been found intact conform to this. Though perhaps sometimes imitated by priests, the being must in essence be a supernatural creature, an antediluvian sage whose traditions are reflected in the myths of the Seven Sages.

See bucket and cone

fish-man and fish-woman see merman and mermaid

#### Flood

Both great rivers of Mesopotamia, the Tigris and the Euphrates, are prone to flood when swollen by the spring rains and the snow-melt. The Tigris especially can rise during the period February to May and cause destructive floods of immense proportions over a very wide area of the flat alluvial plain. These sudden, violent floods were a frequent feature of life in southern Mesopotamia until flood-control engineering in the 1950s. Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of several extensive floods at various sites and at different periods.

So it was natural for floods to be a powerful literary image, and the destructive inundation was a favourite metaphor for the destructive power of a deity. Nor is it surprising that Mesopotamian mythology should include legends of one great Flood accompanied by torrential rainstorms that was more extensive than any



66 A view of the marshlands in the far south of Mesopotamia, in present-day Iraq

other – that covered the whole world, in fact. The Sumerian King List gives the names of eight kings of five cities who ruled before the Flood (other sources mention nine or ten kings). The last of these was the father of Ziusiur, the sage who with his family was chosen by the god Enki to survive the Flood, when the rest of mankind perished. In other Mesopotamian versions of the story he is called Atrahasis or Utnapishtim.

From Mesopotamia the myth of the universal Flood spread to Ugarit, and in Palestine, where it was incorporated into the Hebrew Book of Genesis. Possibly the Greek flood myths of Deukalion, Ogyges and Dardanos are influenced by the Mesopotamian story also. Persian legend, 'Flood' (*abshar*) was the name of a winged cosmic monster.

Some modern authorities have implausibly interpreted the story of the Flood as a metaphor for a 'flood' of people, relating it to the Semitic immigrations onto the Mesopotamian plain.

See Gilgamesh, lion

## flour

Numerous different types of flour were used in a variety of rituals. Flour might be used for making a magic drawing, e.g. of a sorcerer thought to have bewitched the patient. In various divination and exorcistic rituals, flour is scattered on the ground, and a special ritual use of flour is to make small heaps of it (*zab-dubba*, literally 'mied up flour'), sometimes together with *zaburruhi* (scattered grain). When separate heaps of flour are made in front of gods, or in front of other objects symbolising the gods, the heaps represent offerings. In other rituals, as explicitly stated, the heaps themselves symbolise certain gods whose presence is desired during the procedures.

Various doughs made from different cereal flours were used, mixed with herbs, to make pastes for medical treatments. They were also used ritually in the manufacture of figurines for magical rituals intended to improve sexual potency or to undo the effects of sorcery.

See diseases and medicine; magic and sorcery; prostitution and ritual sex.

flowing vase – see vase with streams.

## fly

In the Mesopotamian versions of the Flood story, the bodies of dead humans floating on

the flood waters are compared to flies. When Utnapishtim (*Ziusiur*), the survivor of the Flood, makes the first sacrifice after the ark comes to land, the gods smell the savour and buzz as and like flies. To express her regret that the Flood was ever sent, the mother goddess Ninkur (or Belet-ili in the version of the story in the Epic of Gilgamesh) (see mother goddesses and birth goddesses) touches the necklace of fly-jewels that Anu (An) made her wearing that she will never forget the terrible event. Lapis lazuli beads in the shape of flies have been found in Mesopotamia, and other fly-jewellers is known from temple inventories.

In a Sumerian poem, a little fly helps Inanna when the galla demons are hunting down Dumuzi.

The image of a fly on Old Babylonian seals has been thought possibly to be a symbol of Nergal as god of disease and death.

## food and drink of the gods

Unlike the Greek Olympians with their ambrosia and nectar, the Mesopotamian gods had no special foods which were the privilege of divinity. However, in the story of the sage Adapa, Anu (An) decides that Adapa shall be offered the 'bread of life' and the 'water of life' when he visits heaven, and it is clear from the context that to have consumed these would have conferred (eternal) life. In fact, believing them to be the bread and water of death, he declines and loses his chance of immortality.

The gods lived on the sacrifice of sheep, fish, cereals and oil which mankind was obliged to offer them regularly: the same foods as were consumed by man himself. They drank beer and wine (probably date wine as well as grape wine), and in a number of myths gods are depicted as inhibiting to excess. Inanna has to feign sexual excess in order to ward off the drunken advances of her brother Utu in one Sumerian poem and in 'Inanna and Enki' she plies Enki with beer and sweet wine to the point where he agrees formally to bestow on her the me or divine powers of the universe, an action he later regrets when he awakens from his drunken stupor.

See alcohol, animal sacrifice; Ninmah, sacrifice and offering, badura.

## fork

A rare symbol in Mesopotamian art is the trident or three-pronged fishing spear. It is represented on seals of Early Dynastic, Akkadian, Old Babylonian, Old Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian date. It may occur in a group with other, more familiar, symbols of gods, or as an attribute held by a god or hull-man. On one seal from the time of the Old Assyrian trading colony in Anatolia, a god on a hull holds the triple fork of lightning while another god on a hull holds the trident. The two symbols should certainly, therefore, be distinguished. The trident has been explained as the Old Assyrian *ma-lugum*, 'fork'. Which Mesopotamian deity the object symbolised, however, is unknown.

fortune telling – see divination.

foundation deposits – see building rites and deposits.

## frog

In the Sumerian poem 'Inanna and Enki' when Enki awakes to find that in a drunken gambling game he has allowed Inanna to win from him all the me, he attempts to recover them by sending various watery creatures chasing after Inanna's boat. The first is a little frog, whom he grasps 'by its right hand'. Apparently the frog fails, and other creatures are sent on the same errand.

A frog occurs as a symbol of filling motif on cylinder seals of the Kassite Period. Weights were sometimes made in the shape of frogs.

## galla

The *galla* (Akkadian *gallu*) is one of the numerous types of underworld demons especially responsible for hauling unfortunate humans off to the underworld. Often mentioned in incantations in enumerations of seven types of evil demons (see magic and sorcery), the *gallas* in one magical text are said themselves to

number seven (see numbers). Inanna is accompanied by *gallas* on her return from the underworld, and they set off in a pack to fetch the hapless Dumuzi to the nether regions. Several Sumerian poems describe the deserted sheepfold of Dumuzi after the *gallas* have taken him away.

Like most demons or spirits, *gallas* could exist in a favourable form too. In Gudea's hymn the minor god Ig-alima is described as 'the great *galla* of Girsu' (see Ningirsu) see Giesbrecht.

Ginzir: see Ereškigal; gatekeepers; underworld.

### gatekeepers

The entrances to heaven, the underworld and the abzu were usually guarded by one or a pair of lesser divinities. In the poem 'The Descent of Inanna' and in Babylonian magical incantations, a god called *Neti* guards the gate of the underworld (called Ginzir). In 'Nergal and Ereškigal', the gatekeeper of the underworld is not named. In the myth of Adapa, the gods Dumuzi and Enkidu (Ningidida) are found guarding the gate to the heaven of Anu (An), but this was a rôle not usual for them.

Particularly in Assyrian times, gateways were protected by a flanking pair of hybrid animals or animal-men (see demona and monsters), sometimes semi-divine (see lama).

See Enlil-lara and Meslamta-ea; Uru

### Gatumdug

Gatumdug was a goddess of the city-state of Lagash and, like Bau, with whom she was later equated, she was regarded as a daughter of An. She is sometimes called Mother of Lagash or 'Mother who founded Lagash'. Umma, the prince of Lagash who rebuilt the temple of Ningirsu, describes in his great hymn on that subject how he visited the temple of Gatumdug on his way to the temple of Nanshe to obtain an interpretation of a dream. He addresses Gatumdug as mother and father and asks for the protection of her favourable udug and lama deities.

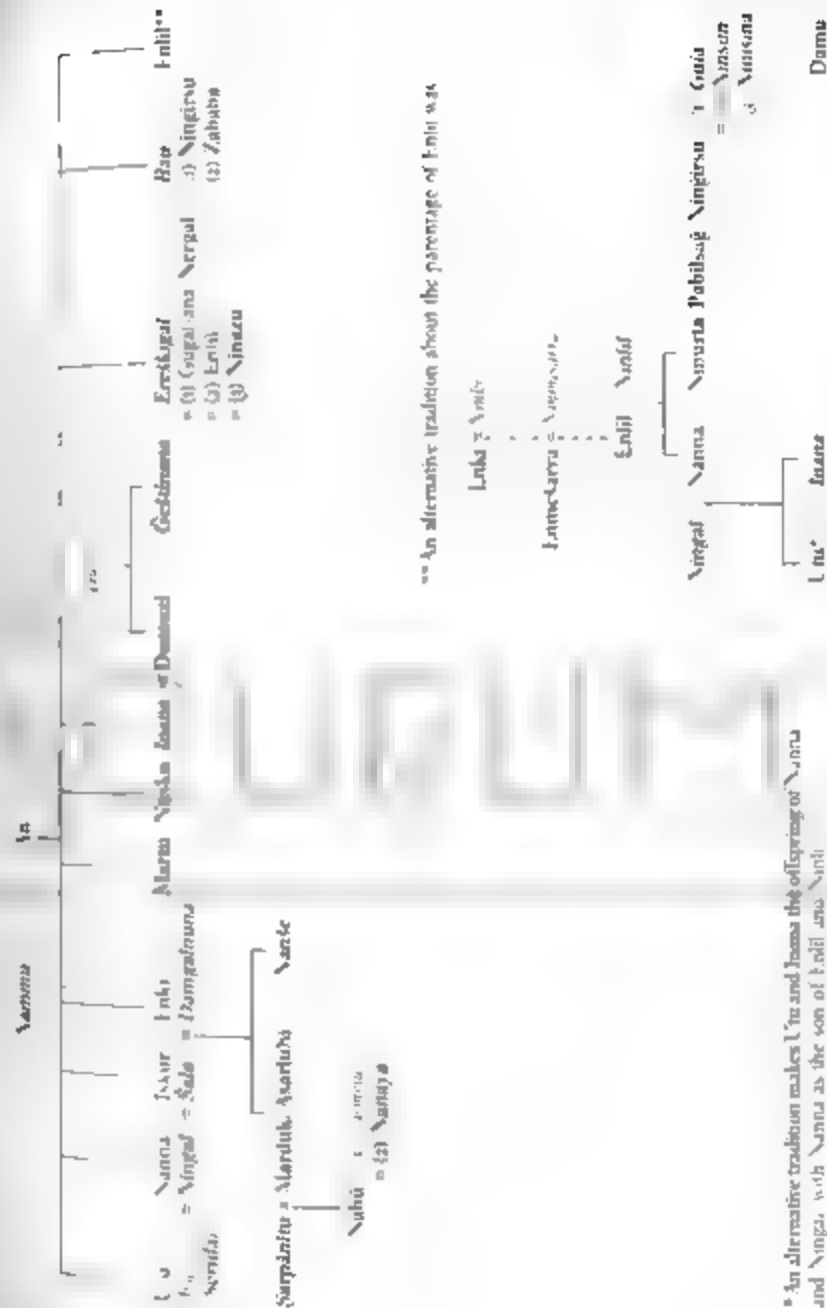
Gatumdug's temple was originally in the temple area at Lagash but was subsequently moved to Girsu.

### generations of gods

Information about the generations of gods is contained in many myths and literary works and also in ancient Mesopotamian lists of gods, set out according to their 'households' with consort, offspring, other relatives, minister, household staff and so on. Marriages and 'parenthood' among the gods are sometimes attributable to geographical closeness of the cult centres where they were worshipped. However, the same god was sometimes worshipped in different places, each with its own traditions, and it was a persistent feature of the history of Mesopotamian religion for local traditions to be gradually syncretised as, throughout the centuries, political units grew larger and larger. So it is sometimes impossible to present united data since several discrepant traditions may be recorded for the same period. The table on page 87 shows the family relationships of some of the principal gods according to the best-known traditions. But it cannot be regarded as exclusively correct and is far from presenting a complete picture: the reader is advised to consult the entries on individual gods and goddesses. In some cases the use of the terms 'brother' and 'sister' in Mesopotamian texts may imply no more than that the deities concerned were of the same 'generation'; similarly 'father' sometimes means 'ancestor', and so forth.

### genies

A number of so-called 'genies' are found in Assyrian monumental and minor arts, often engaged in royal rituals. Sometimes animal hybrids such as the griffin-demon appear to take part in rituals, but more often such participants are anthropomorphic. Some types are clearly minor deities, since they wear the horned cap as a mark of their divinity; others may be human. A male winged god, standing or kneeling, holds a bucket and cone and can be involved in the scenes of ritual centred on the



\* An alternative tradition makes Uru and Inanna the offspring of Nanna and Ningal, with Nanna as the son of Enlil and Ninlil.

† Genealogical table of Mesopotamian gods and goddesses. Female deities are indicated in *italics*. Dotted lines indicate descent rather than parenthood, or else a variant tradition.

## Gesimana

Gesimana is the goddess who was the faithful sister of Dumuzi and, like him, a child of the sheep goddess Duttur. Her cult was widespread over Sumer until the Old Babylonian Period. She seems to have been thought of sometimes as an 'old woman, an interpreter of dreams', as 'Mother Gesimana'. When Inana determines that, in order to secure her own release from imprisonment in the underworld, her husband Dumuzi shall take her place, galla demons come to fetch the young shepherd god from his sheepfold in the country Gesimana, his sister, who is also a rural deity after whom fields were named (hence too her equation with the later Akkadian goddess Belet-gêrî, 'Lady of the open countryside'), helps her brother to hide from the demons by sending him successively to four different hiding places. In another version of the story, she refuses to give him away even when tortured. In the event a friend of Dumuzi reveals his whereabouts to the demons. Gesimana sings a death lament for him. It was believed that subsequently she and Dumuzi alternated six-month periods in the underworld, where she sometimes functioned as scribe to Ereshkigal.

ghosts, see *gidim*.

## Gibil (Girra)

Cubil or Cirra (Akkadian *girra*) is deified fire. Viewed as a god, Cirra was thought to be a son of Anu (An) and the goddess Sala. He represented fire in all its aspects as a destructive force and as the burning heat of the Mesopotamian summer; and, as a creative force, the fire in the smith's furnace and the fire in the kiln where bricks are baked, and so as a 'founder of cities'.

See Nushu.

## gidim

The *gidim* (Akkadian *gizimu*) is, first of all, the spirit of a dead person, living in the underworld, who must be propitiated and revered. The condition of such spirits is not, in general,

happy, and regular funerary offerings of food and drink must be made to them. If not fed, they can become restless and liable to haunt the living. The *gidim* is also, then, the ghost who returns from the underworld to persecute the living. Especially those who had died violent deaths were likely to be unsettled in the underworld and 'seize' living persons. They might enter the body through the ear. Magic could be employed against them.

Necromancy, the deliberate raising of ghosts, was known and practised in Babylonia. Questions about the future could be put to a ghost raised in this way, although it was recognised that this was a very dangerous activity since a ritual exists to counteract the ill effects caused by practising necromancy (see magic and sorcery).

Ghosts were also thought to be able to cause some diseases. *Qar gizimu* (literally 'hand of the ghost') seems to have been a more or less psychosomatic ailment. On the other hand, *sibi gizimu* ('seizure by the ghost') appears to have had definite physical symptoms.

See afterlife.

## Gilgames

Most scholars take the view that Gilgames probably was a historical king of the Sumerian city Uruk (in Akkadian, Uruk) some time during the early part of the Early Dynastic Period. However, we can definitely say that during the later Early Dynastic Period a *god* Gilgames (or *the* Gilgames) gave the early Sumerian form of his name) was already being worshipped at a number of different places in Sumer. The first certain connection of this god with Uruk was when Uru-hegal, king of Uruk, adopted Gilgames as his patron deity. Under Uru-hegal's immediate successors, the Third Dynasty of Uruk, Gilgames was also worshipped at a small town near Uruk. This may be why the kings of the Third Dynasty were especially attached to Gilgames, calling him their 'divine brother' and 'friend'. Probably from this period derive the various legends according to which Gilgames was a famous king of Uruk, contemporary with En-me-bar-agesse, a historically attested early

ruled of the city of Kish, or with the latter's son Agga.

The five independent narrative poems in Sumerian survive in manuscripts from the first half of the second millennium BC and are usually called by the titles given to them by their modern editors. 'Gilgames and Agga' is the story of the successful rebellion of Gilgames against his overlord and benefactor, King Agga of Kish. 'Gilgames and Eridu' (or Gilgames and the Cedar Forest) relates how the hero and his serving man Enkidu defeat and kill the monster Huwawa, who had been appointed by Enlil as guardian of the Cedar Forest. 'Gilgames and the Bull of Heaven' tells how the heroic duo defeat and kill the Bull of Heaven, sent against Gilgames by the goddess Inana perhaps after he had rejected her sexual advances. 'The Death of Gilgames' is poorly preserved, but apparently referred to an important state funeral, and the arrival of the deceased in the underworld. It may perhaps have been misinterpreted, as it could refer rather to the death of Enkidu. In 'Gilgames, Enkidu and the Nether World', Gilgames questions the shade of Enkidu about conditions in the underworld.

By the Old Babylonian Period, stories about Gilgames and his adventures had been elaborated into one or more poems in Akkadian. However, the most complete version, a grand epic which survives in twelve fragmentary tablets, was compiled by one Sin-leqe-unninni, probably in Middle Babylonian times, and first discovered in the excavation of the library of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (reigned 668-627 BC) at his capital Nineveh. Some of the gaps in the narrative can be filled by fragments found at other sites in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant.

The epic opens with a prologue (in praise of Gilgames, builder and first king of Uruk, the great warrior, one-third human, two-thirds divine. There is allusion, however, to the king's 'oppression of the city, usually interpreted either as his tyrannical compulsion of the citizens in forced labour or as his sexual oppression of the population. In order to curb

68 A winged genie with a sacrificial deer. From a monumental stone relief in the throne room of the royal palace of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal II (reigned 683-669 BC) at Kish (modern Nimrud).

49 stylised tree. A similar female figure holds a chaplet of beads. Such figures might be covered by the Akkadian term *aludlammu*, which seems also to have been applied to bulls and lions with human head (see lama). A third figure carries a flowering branch, sometimes also a sacrificial(?) goat. Sometimes he wears the horned cap, and even when he does not he often has wings. Presumably, therefore, such figures are also non-mortal: they may represent the Seven Sages in human guise.

See fish-garbed figure.



69 Gilgamesh and Enkidu pin down and slaughter the monster Humbaba. From a baked clay moulded plaque of the Old Babylonian Period.

these excesses, Anu (An) creates Enkidu, an uncivilised brute of a man who at first runs wild among the animals. Tamed and initiated into the ways of the human world by his encounter with the prostitute Sanhita, however, Enkidu journeys to Uruk for the inevitable confrontation with the king. Gilgamesh is ready for him. The second tablet describes a wrestling bout between the two men (see *wrestlers*). Gilgamesh is the victor, but the strength and tenacity of his opponent win him lasting respect and friendship. Enkidu hereafter is treated as the equal partner and companion of Gilgamesh (not his slave as in most Sumerian versions).

In tablets III-V the companions travel together to the distant Cedar Forest, guarded in the name of Enlil by the terrifying Humbaba (the Akkadian name for Huwawa). The rest of the engagement is lost to us, but it is likely that Humbaba is defeated and killed. When the sixth tablet begins, Gilgamesh has returned to his city. The city goddess Ishtar (Akkadian name of Inana) proposes marriage, but Gilgamesh rejects her advances and, with Enkidu's help, slays the dreaded Bull of Heaven that the vengeful goddess sends against him.

At the beginning of tablet VII Enkidu recounts a dream in which Anu (An), Ea (Enki) and Shamash (Utu) had decided that for killing Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven either Gilgamesh or Enkidu must die. They choose Enkidu. (In the Sumerian poem 'Gilgamesh and

Huwawa' Enkidu's specific crime was his lack of compassion for Huwawa.) Enkidu subsequently sickens, and dreams of the underworld that must await him. He dies. The lament of Gilgamesh for his late friend and the details of the state funeral are narrated in the eighth tablet.

The next episode (in tablets IX-XI) leads up to the story of the Flood and its hero, which in Sumerian literature had been an independent poem. Depressed by the death of Enkidu and feelings of his own mortality, Gilgamesh makes a long journey—involving many dangers, to the home of Utnapishtim (Ziusiurra), to learn from him the secret of immortality. When he finally arrives, Utnapishtim relates the story of his escape from the Flood and his attainment of eternal life. In response to the plea of Gilgamesh for immortality, Utnapishtim challenges him to defy sleep. This Gilgamesh fails to do immediately, falling asleep and not awakening for seven days. If not eternal life, Utnapishtim is still able to offer restored youth, directing Gilgamesh to the place of a plant which has the properties of rejuvenation. Gilgamesh picks the plant, but he leaves it on the shore while he takes a refreshing swim, and its smell is caught by a nearby serpent, who snatches it. Hurrying away, the serpent sheds its old skin for a new one. (See 'plant of life'.)

Despondent, Gilgamesh returns to Uruk, showing off his city to Utnapishtim's boatman Utnashim (called Surcunabu in the Old Babylonian version).

The twelfth tablet is an appendix relating to the loss of certain objects which had been given to Gilgamesh by Ishtar. This is a close parallel to part of the Sumerian 'Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World' that did not fit well into the new epic and so was relegated to the end. The poem thus concludes with a vision of the spirit of Enkidu, who promises to recover the lost objects, but who gives a bleak report on conditions in the afterlife.

From some (probably three) of the Sumerian Gilgamesh poems and other material, some romantic narratives and others more philosophical, the Akkadian Epic of Gilgamesh

creates a work of outstanding sensitivity and beauty. The focus is on the sharp contrast between the hero's disdain of danger in the first part and his haunting terror of death in the second.

There is one important event in the life of Enmešar that neither the Sumerian nor the Akkadian version treats, the hero's birth. Since his exploits might have been considered of more interest, this might not, perhaps, be surprising in itself. Yet birth legends were a common feature of Mesopotamian and Near Eastern heroic epics, and the omission is the more striking because there is a chance mention of Gilgamesh's birth preserved in the work of a classical author, Aelian's *On the Nature of Animals*. According to this account (narrated as an illustration of the kindness of animals to men), King 'Succothorus' of 'the Babylonians' had been warned by his magicians that a son born to his daughter would usurp his throne. He therefore kept the girl at the scepter under close guard. Nevertheless, she became pregnant, and the guards, fearing the king's wrath, kept the child from the woman. The baby was saved by an eagle in flight (re-telling the story of Etana). The bird took him to an orchard, where the child was carefully reared. The caretaker of the place found the baby and took care of him. The child, who was later to become king, was called 'Gilgamesh'. The story is in the tradition of other Near-Eastern birth legends (Sargon, Cyrus, Moses). This account and the Hittite version of the epic do, however, hint at traditions about the birth and early life of Gilgamesh at a time before he became king of Uruk, and it has been suggested that this could help to explain his appearance in his own city at the beginning of the epic. If he were a usurper of the throne, a certain resentment and a degree of repression might be expected.

Although the stories about Gilgamesh had a long history and were apparently widely known in the Near East, depictions of the legend are hard to come by. The hero figure with long hair, typically with four or six large curls (see *Lahmu*), and his concomitant

bull-man, common in Mesopotamian art of most periods, have popularly been taken to represent Gilgamesh and Enkidu, but this is incorrect. Some works of art of the second millennium BC, however, mostly clay plaques (figurines) and seals, do seem to depict two of the episodes in the Gilgamesh stories. In one a pair of human figures attack a demonic figure (often a version of the 'hero' with curls; the two men stab or hack at the demon with their weapons, each using one leg to pin him down. This must be the slaughter of Huwawa/Humbaba. A second scene shows a similar human pair attacking a monstrous winged human-headed bovine, almost certainly the Bull of Heaven.

## gipar

The *gipar* (Akkadian *giparu*) was the residence of the *entu* priest or priestess (Akkadian *entu* or *entu*) (see *priests and priestesses*) and the administrative centre of their households. The *gipar* at Ur was rebuilt by the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus when, revisiting the ancient shrine, he dedicated his daughter En-nigaldi-Nanna as *entu* of Nanna following an eclipse of the moon on 26 September 548 BC. The building was excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley. The original *gipar* (built during the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur), located adjacent to the main temple enclosure of Nanna which included the ziggurat, was divided into two sections, one the residence proper of the *entu* and her household, including a cemetery of former *entu* priestesses, and the other incorporating the *entu*'s personal temple to the goddess Ningal (the wife of Nanna). As rebuilt by Nabonidus, the *gipar* was relocated slightly further east. A new temple of Ningal was built inside the enclosure of the temple of Nanna.

In the time of the Assyrian governor Sinalassu-inbi during the reign of Assurbanipal (reigned 668-627 BC), the original site of the *gipar* had been occupied by a building heavily protected by magical deposits of sun-dried clay figurines buried in the foundations. They were placed in boxes of 'plano-convex' bricks, unused architecturally since the Early

70) Neo-Assyrian sun-dried clay figurines of the goat-fish and the merman, probably from the city of Uruk. Although no details of their discovery are known, they will have been placed within a brick box buried in the foundations of a building to counter evil. Lengths 40-50 mm.



Dynastic Period and probably excavated from an ancient ruin (see building rites and deposits).

(*contra* see Gubil).

(*Gubila*: see Ningiiszida).

goat-fish

A creature with the head and forelegs of a goat and body of a fish is represented from Neo-Sumerian through to Hellenistic times, and even had a revival, as Capricornus, at the hands of the Romans (especially in Augustan art, Capricorn being the emperor's zodiac sign).

The identification of the Mesopotamian creature with the *imhurmasu*, 'capr-goat', is proved by a kudurru caption and by the inscriptions prescribed in Assyrian rituals for figurines of the type, which appear on actual examples. Association with the god Ea (Enki), suspected from the frequent iconographic juxtaposition with the ram-headed staff (see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods), is confirmed by texts, but the figure could also be a generally magically protective type, often paired with the merman in pictorial representations.

goat-headed staff: see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods.

gods and goddesses

The gods of the ancient Mesopotamians, in historical times, were almost without exception anthropomorphic, male or female. It seems that they were imagined as of gigantic size and of superhuman powers, although the power of all the gods was by no means equal: some were relatively minor or of restricted influence.

They shared the emotions and troubles of mankind. Generally speaking they were immortal, although there are certain gods, such as Dumuzi, Gugalana (see Ereškigal), Geshtinana and the Sumerian Heroes, about whom myths are recounted which involve their deaths or visits to the underworld (see dead gods). In many of the gods exuded oil, as the Mesopotamians said, *was* *melam* which



71) Gods fight among themselves. Modern rolled impression of a lapis lazuli cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period, said to be from Kish. Ht. 280 mm.

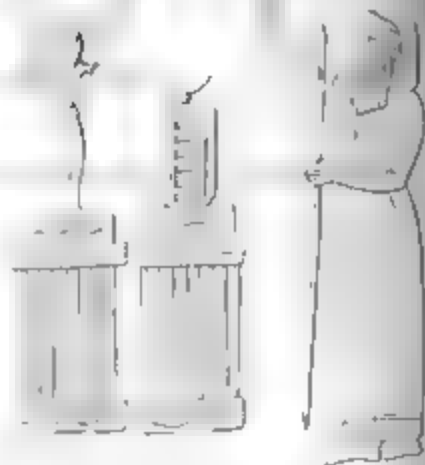


72) Head, broken from a baked clay statuette of a goddess, wearing the distinctive horned cap as a mark of her divinity. Probably Neo-Babylonian. Ht. 131 mm.

73 King Nabû-apla-iddina of Babylon is introduced into the presence of the sun god Samas. He sees the shrine the god's solar disk is suspended on an altar. From a stone tablet commemorating the restoration of the temple of Samas at Sippar in c. 870 BC.

covered them in a terrifying splendour. Although they lived in heaven or the underworld, an extension of their personality also inhabited the various cult statues erected to them by mankind; when a statue was first dedicated, the Babylonians performed the 'Washing the mouth' and 'Opening the mouth' rituals for it in order to enable it to become imbued with the divine presence.

The largest group of gods are the deities of the various city pantheons. To these can be added gods and goddesses representing natural forces (Ishtar, Nisaba, Iškur, etc.), birth goddesses (see mother goddesses and birth goddesses), groups of anonymous gods (such as the Anuna, Igigi or gods of the night), master deities (not deities who attend more important gods and goddesses), as well as deities of inchoate personality assigned to the primordial period before the splitting of heaven and earth. Next come the personal gods of individuals ('a man's god') chiefly dis-



74 A man worships before two altars, each supporting a divine symbol (in this case the lion-headed standard of the underworld god Nergal and the crescent of the moon god Sin). From a cylinder seal, Neo-Babylonian Period.

75 The image of kingship left Naram-Suen the king of Akkad (c. 2250 BC) wearing his horned crown. Found from his seals commemorating his victory over the Lullubi, found a Suse in north-west Iran, where it had been taken as booty in antiquity. (right) King Assurnasirpal II of Assyria (reigned 883-859 BC) in ceremonial religious dress. Assyrian kings were not deified, but were the chief priests of the god Assur. From an ivory casket (?) panel from Kalhu (modern Nimrud).

tinguished by their not being named. Demons, which can be both beneficent or evil, are normally under the command of gods, and usually operate very much in the world in which mankind lives. Finally some human beings were deified: most of the Akkadian, Sumerian and Babylonian kings from Naram-Suen (reigned 2310-2274 BC) to Samsu-iluna (reigned 1684-1651 BC) were deified in their own lifetimes and received a cult in temples throughout their kingdoms, but the practice died out thereafter.



In order to deal conceptually with the extreme proliferation of deities (more than 1,000 names have been recovered), the gods were organised by the Mesopotamians into groups for which the metaphors of 'household', 'extended family' or 'state' can be used. The divine pairings of the various cities participate in myths in a consociate assembly of the gods, which may reflect a human political phenomenon of the Third Dynasty of Ur. The gradual organisation of the local gods into a national pantheon, like a great tribe with several generations, also threw upon individual gods worshipped under the same name in two different places might have two quite different cults and would then be just regarded as, for example, Anu (An) of Uruk or Anu of Der, Istar (Inanna) of Uruk or Istar of Uruk, or Nanesch. Ashur was sometimes called the 'Assyrian family'. In due course the overall number of deities was reduced by the expedient of equating or regarding as forms of each other deities whose character was similar. At its most extreme this led to the so-called monoththeistic tendencies of the cult of Marduk, in which, at one point, all the other male gods' names were alleged to begin more than the 'names of Marduk'.

When depicted in art, from at least the third millennium in, gods are generally shown wearing the horned cap with up to seven superimposed sets of bull's horns. This is described as a mark of their divinity. They can also be identified by their distinctive symbols or attributes. The majority of these, some first depicted in the prehistoric, others in the Akkadian Period, are found with very little change of form or meaning down to the time of the Persian empire (at least in a few cases by accident). When not represented together with a god, these motifs nevertheless symbolise their associated deities.

See Anuna, generations of gods, 'great gods', Igigû: lists of gods

Conf with mace: see mace

'Conf with staff': see Ninsubur (god)

## good and evil

Every human society has notions of good (morally laudable) and bad (morally reprehensible) behaviour. When these notions are elevated to be independent abstract principles, we speak of good and evil, and some religious systems can be interpreted in terms of these two opposing powers, sometimes seen as constantly locked in combat with each other. The complexity of ancient Mesopotamian religion, resulting from the syncretism over many years of numerous local cults, was not conducive to such a view, even in the Standard Babylonian tradition, and in Neo-Assyrian religion we occasionally come across personified concepts like Kish (truth), a daughter of Samas (sun), Marduk (justice), a son of Samas, and Dagan (the Judge), as deities.

While the principal deities Enlil, Uu-Samas and Enki (or Enlil) promote justice and activities beneficial to man, protect the weak, widows and orphans, and destroy the wicked, these are secondary characteristics of their divine personalities, rather than their personalities being an extension of the role as a personification of good. The wicked are often not distinguished from the enemy. The Sumerian gods, amongst themselves, behave amorally, even immorally.

Many of the spirits we call 'demons' such as the *lilim*, *lilitu*, *galla* or *galla*, were originally neutral, and the evil forms of them are specifically identified as evil *lilim*, evil *galla*, etc. (except that in certain contexts reference to the evil form is taken for granted). Perhaps the nearest to a specifically evil personification in the Mesopotamian record is the demon often mentioned in magical incantations called *Ummu-udim*, which means 'All that is evil'. No information survives about how the physical features of this demon were envisaged.

See Lamastu, sin

grave: see Bau

graves: see death and funerary practices

## 'great gods'

The term 'great gods' is used sometimes, apparently of the gods in general, but more usually of the principal deities of the pantheon. When the names referred to are enumerated or invoked by name, the list varies slightly from time to time, but the most usual mentions in Assyrian royal inscriptions are seven or seven or number. The personal preferences of the royal kings (see personal gods) would affect the inclusions and the order. For example, the devotion of Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) to the god Ninurta placed him high among, and perhaps at the head of, this group, but he is thereafter seldom mentioned. Ashur was normally placed at the beginning of the list of Assyrian

deities, especially the goddess Ishtar (Inanna), who seems to take precedence during his reign (883-859 BC).

On the stelae erected by Assyrian kings (or, exceptionally, provincial governors) to commemorate special events or the limits of successful campaigns, the king is always shown below symbols of the principal gods. These and other associated deities are invoked in the accompanying inscriptions.

See Igigû

## griffin

Griffin (from Greek *griffon*) was the name used in medieval Europe, and today in studies of art, for a fabulous composite animal, typically having the body (winged or wingless), hind



Griffin fragment, from a winged griffin, from Kish, Sumerian Period. The fragment is shown in a dynamic, possibly attacking or standing posture, with its wings spread and tail curved.



78 A monumental stone relief from the royal palace of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) at Kalhu (modern Nimrud). It depicts a so-called griffin demon, thought of at the time as an ancient sage in bird guise. He carries a bucket and cone for purification. The inscription at the middle of the relief records (in a way common to all the slabs from this palace) the conquests of the king. Ill. 2.32a

legs and tail of a lion and the head and foreparts of a bird, usually an eagle. Probably originating in the second millennium BC, the griffin was known throughout the Near East in the Achaemenid period and in Greece by the fourth century BC. It is often paired with the sphinx (see bulls and lions with human head). In Assyrian art it is sometimes depicted together with the griffin-demon.

The head of the griffin is human or scaled on its haunches. The Near Eastern version has a crested head, while the Greek is usually shown with a row of spiral curls forming a mane which, in both the Near East and Greece, the creature has large donkey ears, perhaps from some association to the lion-dragon. The neck is often parted to show the curled tongue.

Apparently the creature had some religious significance, being shown in the Near East among the beasts of the gods and in the Western European art. It may have been magically protective, but its precise associations and functions are unknown.

#### griffin demon

With possible antecedents from the Old Babylonian Period and with those and others in Mesopotamia, the griffin demon (as depicted in his animal form) – a human-bodied figure with bird's head and wings – on Middle Assyrian seals, and became a very popular figure in Neo-Assyrian art, especially in the seventh century BC. After the seventh century BC, the figure is rare, but occurs on Seleucid Period seals. The private quarters of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) were dominated by reliefs depicting this creature.

In the Neo-Assyrian Period figures of this type were especially as protective deities of the Babylonian Seven Sages, and groups of seven figures of them were used as foundation deposits to protect houses and palaces (see building rites and deposits) – alongside very different archaic mythical figures and figures of the fish-headed figure (also supposed to represent the Seven Sages).

See bucket and cone, Nimrud.

'Guardians of the gate' see gatekeepers

god-alm: see bison; bull-man

Gugal ana: see Ereškugal

#### Gula

The goddess Gula (whose name means 'great') was a healing goddess, who understands disease, and a patroness of dreams. She was also worshipped under the names Ninurta, Nin-Karrak and Mele. Originally the names of other goddesses, and as Ninurta, Lady of Isin. Her principal shrine was the E-gal-mah at Isin, but she also had temples at Nippur, Borsippa and Akkur. She was regarded as the wife of Ninurta or Pabilsag, or else of the minor vegetation god Abu. Gula was the mother of the healing god Damu, and of the god Ninazu, also associated with healing.

Her sacred animal was the dog, and seven model dogs were dedicated to her by worshippers (see dedication).

See diseases and medicine



79 The goddess Gula and her dog. The relief from the carving on a *kadrum* of the reign of the Babylonian king Nabu-mukin-apli (reigned 978-943 BC).

## hand

Because the hand symbolises control or seizure, a number of diseases have names in Akkadian which indicate that they were thought to be directly attributable to the power of various gods: hand of Samas (Šamaš), hand of Ištar (Ištar), hand of the ghost (gidim), 'hand of the god' (see diseases and medicine). It is not usually possible to identify these illnesses or groups of symptoms in modern medical terms.

Small models of hands, made from stone, bone or shell, were common amulets in the Early Dynastic Period, and are known occasionally from later periods. The symbol of a hand, sometimes mounted on a pole and with varying numbers of fingers, is seen on seals of the Old Babylonian Period; its significance is unknown.

## 'hands-of-Ištar'

*Šar-lī-lī-šar* 'hand-of-Ištar (Ištar)' is the name of a psychological illness of some sort (see hand). In modern archaeological usage, however, the term has been used to refer to a particular type of object: baked clay images of clenched fists. They were inserted into the walls of the major buildings of the Assyrian kings Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) and his son and successor Šalmaneser III (reigned 825-825 BC). The inscriptions on the backs of the hands record the name of the king and of the palace or temple into which they were set. They have sometimes been regarded as magical devices for the averting of evil from the buildings, although some commentators have not unreasonably explained them simply as consoles for supporting (perhaps in a decorative rather than structural sense) the beams of the ceiling or of an upper storey. Since they were coated in bitumen, it is very likely that they also functioned as scoops to drain off the rain water. In any event, the use of the term 'hands-of-Ištar' for these devices has no textual basis.

Haniš: see Iškur

Haya: see Nisaba

heaven: see cosmology

Hundursag: see Išum

'horn with curls': see Labnu

## horned cap

From the early third millennium BC onwards a cap with up to seven superimposed pairs of horns is the distinctive head-dress of divinity. It is seen as a separate symbol, often standing on a podium, from the late Kassite Period down to the Neo-Babylonian, and continued to be represented as a mark of divinity in Achaemenid art. Originally a general indication of divine status, its use as a symbol of a particular major deity was never consistent. On Kassite kudurrus the symbol is named as that of the supreme god Anu (An), but in Neo-Assyrian art it was apparently transferred to the new national god Aššur. Sometimes, however, three caps then represented Assur-Anu (An) and Enlil, or in Babylonia two such caps symbolised the latter two, with very occasionally a third cap standing for Ea (Ea) in place of his ram-headed staff. The style of the cap changed from time to time according to fashion, being either domed or flat-topped, sometimes trimmed with leather or surmounted by a knob or fleur-de-lis.

80 The symbol of the multi-horned cap placed on an altar as it was commonly carved on the Babylonian *kudurrus* monuments.

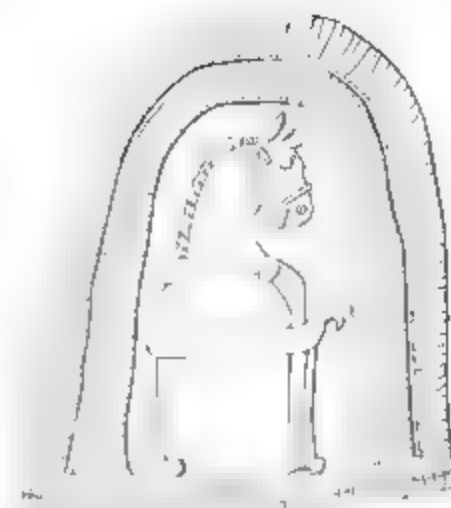


The horned cap may well be derived from the horns of wild cattle (*Bos primigenius*), which even after the domestication of cattle, remained as a separate species throughout the Near East. It was used to mark the plains of marshes in Mesopotamia as late as the Assyrian times when they were hunted by Assyrian kings. The wild bull may have been a truly awe-inspiring beast, as he tall at his shoulder and with a prominent pair of wide spreading horns. Domestic cattle were tamed by comparison. As a visual and literary image of power and strength, wild cattle preoccupied the Mesopotamians in connection with a metaphor for deity or a suitable comparison for heroes or kings.

horoscopes: see zodiac

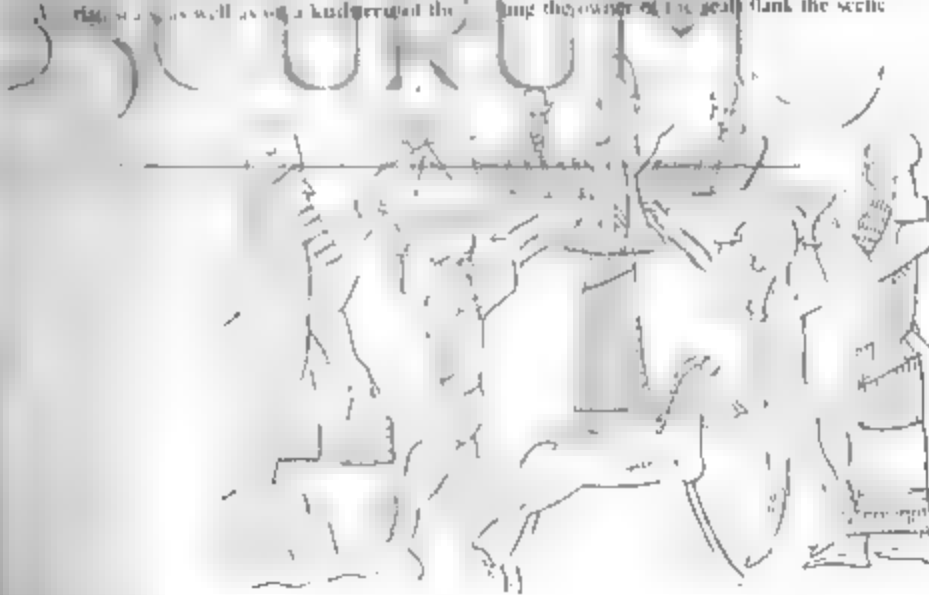
## horse

The horse had been introduced into Mesopotamia by the first half of the second millennium BC. As a symbol of a centaur is the seven-headed Aššur-Aššur. The motif of a horse's head on an altar is a symbol of a deity of the second millennium BC, and is seen on the *kudurrus* as well as on a *kudurrus* of the



81 Symbol of a horse's head on an altar. Detail from the carving on a *kudurrus* of the Babylonian king Nebucadrezzar I (reigned 1125-1104 BC).

82 Detail from a Neo-Assyrian cylinder seal. The sun god Samas, within his winged disc supported by bull men, stands on a horse while a fish-armed figure and worshipper (representing the owner of the seal) flank the scene.



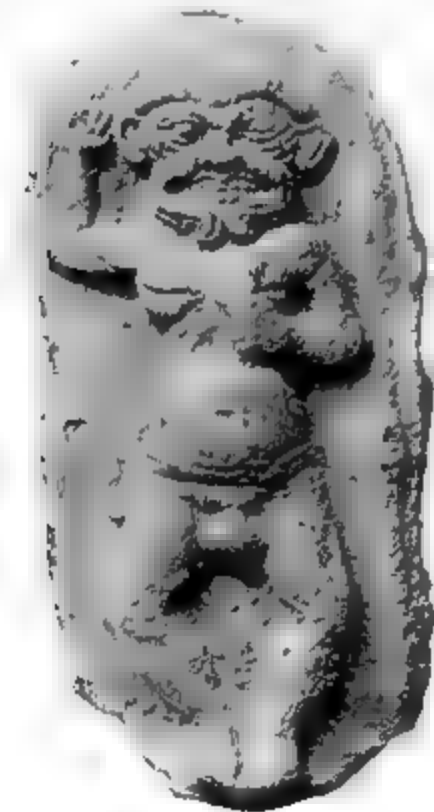




## Huwawa (Humbaba)

Huwawa (Akkadian Humbaba) appears in the Gilgamesh stories as Enlil's guardian of the Cedar Forest. Described as a giant protected by seven layers of terrifying radiance (see melam and ni), he was killed by Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

- 85 In art, Humbaba is typically portrayed as a human-bodied figure with lion's claws for hands, a monstrous face, long hair and whiskers. Clay plaques and seals of the second and first millennia BC depict him being by Gilgamesh and Enkidu: they pin him down with



85 A baked clay relief plaque depicting Huwawa or Humbaba, Enlil's guardian of the Cedar Forest. Probably Isin-Larsa or Old Babylonian Period. Ht. 6.5 cm.

their feet while Enkidu cuts off his head with his sword.

Babylonian models of the face of Humbaba (ranging in date from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Babylonian Periods) were connected with divination: some are inscribed with omens for 'when the omens are like Humbaba', or 'if a woman bore [a foetus] in the shape of Huwawa' – the prognostication is always revolution in the state! It has been thought that such models were used to instruct in divination, but in the Old Babylonian Period faces of Humbaba are frequently seen on clay plaques and on seal designs, set high in the background, as if they were hung on the wall – perhaps as magical charms. The face of Humbaba was carved in stone on one side of the entrance to the Old Babylonian Period temple at Tell al-Rimah.

Huwawa/Humbaba is perhaps a form of the Hittite god Humber. The name and role of Humbaba survive in that of Kumbaba, a guardian figure in a legend from Hellenistic north Syria.

hybrid of a demon and monster

hybrid of a demon and monster

hybrid of a demon and monster

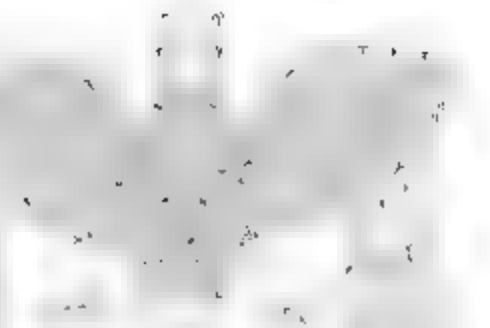
hybrid of a demon and monster

lgi-gu or lgi-gi is a term introduced in the Old Babylonian Period as a name for the (ten) 'great gods'. While it sometimes kept that sense in later periods, from Middle Babylonian times on it is generally used to refer to the gods of heaven collectively – just as the term Anunnakkū (Anuna) was later used to refer to the gods of the underworld. In the Epic of Creation, it is said that there are 300 lgi-gu of heaven.

lgi-gu

lgi-gu is now thought to be the correct reading of the name of a god whose worship was brief but importantly prominent during the Akkadian Period, as a warrior god and person

86 The lion-headed bird Indugud. Detail from the carving on a stone relief dedicated by the priest Iddi-Ishtar of the temple of Enlil at Nippur.



deity of the kings of that dynasty. His name is sometimes found inscribed on the attractive cylinder seals of the period.

After the Akkadian Period he appears to have become almost completely obscure, and is mentioned only occasionally as the master of a hundred of the 'great gods'. There was a temple of lgi-gu at Larsa in the Sumerian Period, but this is not mentioned in the Akkadian Period. The name is also written in a Sumerian text as the weapon 'lgi-gu'.

The suggestion that the god is represented by the so-called 'lgi-gu' with 'lgi-gu' is without foundation.

lgi-gu or lgi-gi

Indugud (Anzu)

Indugud is a lion-headed bird, the correct reading of the Sumerian name. He is a monstrous bird who is called Anzu in Akkadian. He is a bird-like but human in shape of a lion, and of great size so that the flapping of its wings could cause storms and sandstorms. The Indugud was originally imagined as a personification of an army, which is why it is used to describe a word meaning 'army' or 'war'. Other descriptions of the bird indicate that it had a beak like a saw, and was presumably a bird's

head. In Neo-Assyrian art a monster combining bird and lion elements may be the Anzu or the Asakku (Asug) (see Lion- & 107 dragon).

The Indugud or Anzu steals the tablet of destinies from Enki (Sumerian version) or from Enlil (Akkadian version) and the bird is killed by Ninurta who eventually returns the tablet to its rightful owner. This must be a very old myth although not attested until the Old Babylonian Period since the Indugud is already depicted as a legendary animal associated with Ningirsu on the 'Stela of the Vultures' (late Early Dynastic Period) and referred to in connection with this god in a dream recounted by Gudea of Lagash. The association is presumed to derive from Ningirsu Ninurta's defeat of the bird (see Slaying Heroes). On seals of the Akkadian Period, a bird-man is commonly shown being brought before a king as a prisoner, and some have thought to relate this to an early version of the Indugud/Anzu story.

In the Sumerian poem of Lugalbanda, when he is wandering in the Zagros mountains, the hero comes upon the Indugud feeding in its nest; the Indugud and its young return. In Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the 'Neither World' the Indugud and its fledgling nest in a sacred

*halub* tree which Inana has planted in Uruk.  
Later the term *anzu* is used (in the plural also) to refer to heraldic representations of the Anzu bird on buildings etc.  
See E-kur

*Inanna (Sumerian)*: see Seven (gods)

immortality: see Adapa; dead gods; Gilgamesh; Ziusura.

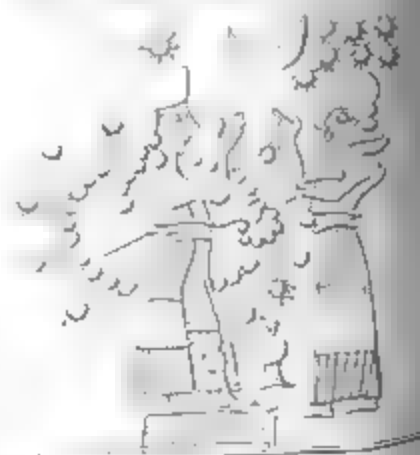
# **Inana (Īstar)**

The goddess Inana or Īstar was the most important female deity of ancient Mesopotamia at all periods. Her Sumerian name Inana is probably derived from a presumed *Nin-ana*, 'Lack of Heaven'; it also occurs as *Inim*. The sign for Inana's name (the ring-post) is found in the earliest written texts. Īstar (earlier E-Īstar), her Akkadian name, is related to that of the South Arabian (male) deity 'Athtar (see Arabian gods) and to that of the Syrian goddess Ashtar (Biblical Ashtoreth), with whom she was undoubtedly connected.

The principal tradition concerning Inana made her the daughter of An, and closely connected with the Sumerian city of Uruk. According to another tradition she was the daughter of the moon god Nanna (Sin) and sister of the sun god Utu (Šamaš). She was also regarded as daughter of Enlil or even of Enki in variant traditions. Inana's sister was Enkikugal, queen of the underworld. Her minister was the goddess Ninkubur. The fact that in no tradition does Inana have a permanent male spouse is closely linked to her role as the goddess of sexual love. Even Dumuzi, who is often described as her 'lover', has a very ambiguous relationship with her and she is ultimately responsible for his death. Nor were any children ascribed to her (with one possible exception, Sara).

It seems likely that with the persona of the classical goddess Inana-Īstar a number of originally independent, local goddesses were syncretised (see local gods). The most important of these was certainly the Inana of Uruk,

87 Aspects of Īstar details of cylinder seal of the Neo-Assyrian Period. The goddess is shown respectively in a state of undress, dressed to suit and (as cult statue) in astral aspect receiving worship



where her principal shrine E-ana ('House of Heaven') was located. But other local forms of the goddess were recognised and received independent cults. Inana of Agade (especially in Hittite times) Inana of the dynasty of Agade Inana of Kish in Assyria (star of Ninurta and Ishtar).

Inana was also intimately associated with the goddess Nanna, with whom she was worshipped as a unit and as a pair.

The personality of Inana-Īstar can be divided into three quite separate strains. One aspect is that of a goddess of love and sexual behaviour, but especially connected with extra-marital sex and – in a way which has not yet been fully researched, notwithstanding the remarks of Herodotus on the subject – with prostitution. Inana is not a goddess of marriage, nor is she a mother goddess. The so-called Sacred Marriage in which she participates carries no overtones of moral implication for human marriage. The sixth tablet of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, in which Gilgamesh is made to bear the burden of a whole world of love and sex, is a text which the best of the available sources for the subject of Inana, as well as the very best Sumerian poems about Inana and her lover Dumuzi.

The second aspect of the goddess's personality is that of a warlike goddess who is fond of battle, which is probably described as the 'playground of Īstar'. Violent and bustling after power, she stands beside her favourite kings as they fight. In a Sumerian poem, Inana campaigns against Mount Ebiš. Her journey to Enlil to obtain me and her descent to the underworld are both described as intended to extend her power. Especially, Īstar of Arba il was a war goddess for the Assyrians.

The third aspect of Inana is as the planet Venus, the morning and evening star. 'I am Inana of the sky', she declares in Inana's Descent to the Underworld. In this form she was sometimes known under the name Ninkuanna. Her transformation in this aspect is celebrated in a poem composed probably in the Kassite Period.

Other myths concerning Inana are 'Inana and Hiluša' (in which Inana turns the old woman Hiluša into a waterskin, believing her to be responsible for the death of Dumuzi), 'Inana and Šu-kale-tuda', and 'Gaganeš, a Kid and the Neither World' in the first part of which Inana transplants a sacred *halub* tree to Uruk, from the wood of which her chair and her bed are later made.

In art, Inana is usually represented as a warrior-goddess, often winged, armed to the hilt, or else surrounded by a nimbus of stars. Even in this aspect she may betray – by her posture and state of dress – her role as goddess of sex and prostitutes. In Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art, a female, shown full frontal and nude or nude from the waist down, who has wings and wears the horned cap of divinity, probably depicts Īstar more specifically in her sexual aspect.

Īstar's beast was a lion. Her usual symbol was the star or star disc. She may also have been symbolised for a time by the rosette.

See Anunnaki hall and 'winged gate' Bull of Heaven cow and calf, E-ana, 'hands-of-Īstar' Ishkur, La-tarak and Lulub; nude woman; 'omega symbol' sacrifice and offering; standards, staves and sceptres of the gods; temples and temple architecture; Zababa.

incantations: see demons and monsters, magic and sorcery

## **incense**

Incense: scented oil on lighted coals in a censer which was moved through the air to disperse a fragrant smoke, was a regular element in Babylonian religious ceremonies. Incense 'offerings' were a normal part of sacrificial rituals, and the use of incense was often called for in magical rituals also. In medical practice, incense, cedar resin or shavings, and other fumigants (usually plants) or aromatics were used as a form of fumigation.

In Old Babylonian times, a form of divination was practised in which omens were

observed in the shape of the smoke rising from the incense.

Innu see Inana.

### Isamud (Usmû)

(ismûd, or in Akkadian Usmû, is a minor god with functions as a minister to Enki-Ea. He acts as a messenger for his god in the Sumerian poems *Enki and Ninkuraga* and *Inana and Enki* (in which he tries to persuade Inana to return home to her father). His name seems to be identical with a word occurring in both Sumerian and Akkadian forms, explained in a commentary as 'with two faces', and so he can be identified with the two-faced deity associated in Mesopotamian art with Enki.

### Ishara

Ishara was a goddess who seems to have been more closely connected with the Semitic tradition than the Sumerian. Her worship may have spread into southern Mesopotamia from the Middle Euphrates region. She seems to have been associated with Dagan, possibly as his wife in one tradition. As a goddess of fertility she is equated with Ishtar (Inana). In other guises she is associated with war and with extirpation (see divination). It is so appears to be

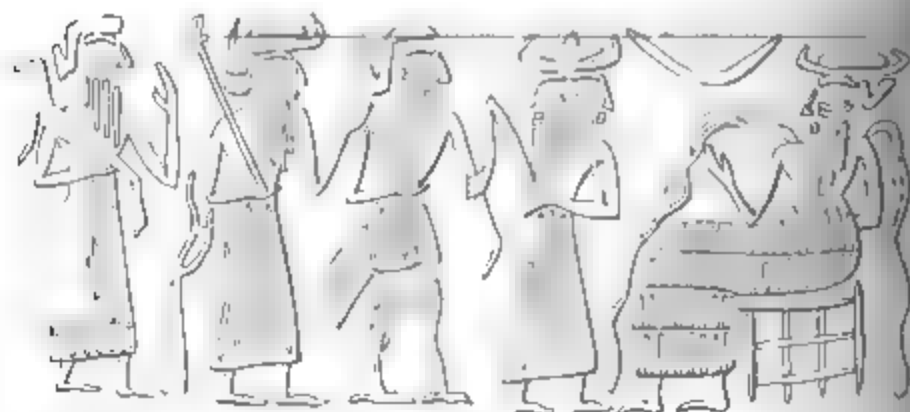
a mother goddess. An explanation of a ritual describes her as mother of the *Sebettu* or Seven (gods). Earlier her associated animal was the *heimm* snake (see snakes), replaced from late Kassite times by the scorpion. Astronomically Ishara is the constellation Scorpius.

An important goddess of the same name was worshipped in south-east Anatolia and north-east Syria, within the Hurrian pantheon. She was associated with the underworld.

### Ikkur (Adad)

The god who embodied the power of storms was known to the Sumerians as Ikkur. The Akkadian equivalent of this deity was Adad (also called Addu or Adts). More at home in the West Semitic area was a related deity called Wer or Mer. Most ancient Near Eastern peoples worshipped a storm god, and Adad was sometimes equated with the Hurrian god Teshub or the Kassite god Buriaš (whose name may be distantly connected with the Greek god of the north wind, Boreas) (see Kassite gods).

Ikkur-Adad was usually regarded as the son of An. According to an older tradition, he was the son of Enlil. His wife was the goddess Sala, possibly of Hurrian origin, also treated as the wife of Dagan. His ministers were the pair of minor deities Sullat and Hapla.



88 The double-faced minister god Usmû shows a bird-man into the presence of the water god Ea. From a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period.

89 The weather god Ikkur, or Adad, is shown in a chariot, with a bull as a symbol of lightning. The bull is a symbol of lightning, and the bull is a symbol of lightning.



The worship of Ikkur probably goes back as far as the Early Dynastic Period, at least the type for the name. The same as the sign for Adad appears in the names of the gods, Karkasa, Ikkur, and Ikkur. A storm god was worshipped in the city of Adad, and a storm god was worshipped in the city of Adad. The storm god was worshipped in the city of Adad, and a storm god was worshipped in the city of Adad.

While Ikkur associated with the Sumerian storm god, he was connected with thunder, storms, lightning, and rain. He was also a symbol of lightning, and a symbol of lightning. He was also a symbol of lightning, and a symbol of lightning.

A representation of lightning symbolised such storm gods. Adad might also (rarely) be represented as a symbol of lightning. The bull of Ikkur is thought to have been the horned dragon, the Adad was the horned dragon or the bull. Storm clouds were called Adad's 'bull-cakes'.

See ring-staff Sacred Marriage, standards, staves and sceptres of the gods, wedge.

90 See Inana.

### Istaran

The cult of the god Istaran is attested from the late (17th) Early Dynastic Period onwards. It appears to have continued vigorously until the Middle Babylonian Period, after which his deification occurs in personal names. His first attestation as a local god of the town of Der, located on the border between Mesopotamia and the east of the Tigris. Istaran's wife was known simply as Darrat Der, 'Queen of Der', and his minister was the snake god Nisab.

Already in the Early Dynastic Period we hear of Istaran invoked as a god who will adjudicate in a border dispute between the city-states of Lagash and Umma. It is possible that he was invoked in this case because there was a shrine of his in the vicinity, but it is also possible that he was felt to be specially qualified because of the location of his own city. Under the ruler of Lagash, mentioned in a stela for Istaran in the great temple of Ningirsu at Girsu, and speaks of the god as a deity associated with justice.

On kudurrus Istaran's beast and symbol is a snake, probably representing Nisab.

**Isam**  
Isam was a popular if not very important god, known from the Assyrian Period on wards. He may have been connected with the Sumerian god Enkidursak, with whom he shared a wife (the goddess Ninmu). According to one text, Samas (Utu) and Sinial were his parents.

The generally beneficent aspects of his character, the god being a protective night-watcher and a herald, he is also associated with the underworld and the god Erida (Nergal). In contrast to whose violent behaviour he acts as a calming influence.

His name may be connected with words in various Semitic languages meaning fire, in which he is not a god of fire (see Erida).

No symbol of Isam is known.

### journeys and processions of the gods

The gods (or rather their cult statues) were transported about the country by chariot or by barge (see boats of the gods, chariots of the gods). A group of Sumerian literary compositions concerns how the gods travel. "The Journey of Nanna-Suen to Nippur" and there is plenty of non-literary evidence which shows that regular journeys actually took place in the Early Dynastic Period and under the Third Dynasty of Ur. Usually the way to Nippur or to Eridu, to obtain a blessing from Enlil as head of the pantheon, or from Enki, as the tributary of the me. Frequent journeys repaired or replaced the processional barge, and this was commemorated in year-names of the Third Dynasty of Ur (but only once thereafter).

"The Journey of Nanna-Suen to Nippur" describes the building of the barge, the offerings that are to be taken on board for the journey, and the six stages – presumably each a day's travel – of the 120 km journey. At each stage the barge is stopped and greeted by the goddess of the town in question, who tries to restrain Nanna-Suen from continuing on his journey. The poem is set in a world populated exclusively by gods. It may represent a journey of the god in which his god's statue was

physically transported to Nippur, but in the poem it is presented as a real visit by the deity of his own volition and by his own agency.

It is possible that after the Third Dynasty of Ur, when Sumer was increasingly occupied with civil and inter-state war, there was no opportunity for the splendid, leisurely progresses of the gods to continue. Sumerian names after 203 BC commemorate the building or repairing of barges. However, transport of cult images certainly occurred again, since in the Babylonian New Year ceremonies, when Nabu's statue was brought by barge from Borsippa to Babylon, and the images of all the gods were transported from Marduk's temple on wagons to the quay and then upstream by barge to be *burial*.

There is a text copied in the Seleucid Period which relates the route and procedures to be followed in a pageant of the cult statue of the god Anu (An) at Uruk, starting at the god's temple and ending at the *burial* outside the city. On the way the procession passes the quay where Anu's barge is moored.

### Kassite gods

The worship of various gods was introduced by the Kassites into Babylonia and, generally speaking, did not survive the end of their rule. Most are known only from personal names.

Harbe, equated with Babylonian Enlil or Anu (An).

Ilmas or Ilidra (= Adad Iskur of Greek Ilereas).

Sugamuna (= Nergal, Nisku, see birds) and Subkuta.

Surias or Sali (= Samas (Utu)).

Hogay.

Marutis (= Ninurta).

Sigak.

Turgu.

### Ki

Ki is the Sumerian word for earth, and was sometimes personified as a goddess and female counterpart to An (the sky). In some Sumerian



with symbols of different deities. The inscription on the stone records a grant of land by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC). The stone is now in the British Museum, London.

accounts. An copulates with Ki to produce a variety of plants. An and Ki themselves were thought to be the offspring of the goddess Ninmu, representing the Mediterranean waters.

Kugar, see Qingu.

Kisar, see Ankar and Kisar.

Ki-iti and Misati, see good and evil.

### kudurrus

*Kudurrus* are large polished stones carrying inscriptions concerning land grants, usually involving the crown or land sales. They are often of dark stone, the shiny black basalt; there are rare examples of rather smaller but related monuments of baked clay. Those *kudurrus* known from excavations were found mostly in temples, standing as records of the royal grants, but it is supposed that these represent replicas of such stones placed on the boundaries of the land allotments themselves (hence the term 'boundary stone' as a common translation of *kudurrus*). The stones have been found only in the north of Mesopotamia. They were probably introduced by the Kassites and were used from Babylon down to the Neo-Babylonian Period (seventh century BC). Although the term was not adopted by the Assyrians in the north, after the time of the fall of Assyria no further *kudurrus* are known.

On the upper parts of *kudurrus* on one face were symbols of deities which were apparently supposed to solemnise the agreements. Direct curses upon those who broke the agreements were included in the text, made in the names of other gods (never those whose symbols are depicted).

On some of the stones the symbols are 'labelled' with the names of the deities they represent, which is a valuable source for identification of the meaning of such symbols (see Introduction). *Kudurrus* with such labelling are among those found from Babylonian antiquity by the Kassites and discovered in excavations at the Elamite city of

Susa: it has been suggested that the labels were added by the Elamites as a 'key' in the symbols of the Babylonian gods. Some of the symbols may represent constellations (see rainbow).

It has been thought by some that the positions of the symbols on the stones were related to the relative ranking of the deities shown, and even if not a deliberate and conscious procedure, a rough correlation is likely because the more important deities would come to mind first, the less important being added lower down on the stone (if space permitted). If true, the suggestion has implications for the detailed reconstruction of Babylonian theological changes and shifts of power of different interest groups attached to the various temples.

The term 'ancient *Indurans*' is used by scholars to refer to lane exchange transactions of the Early Dynastic Period which bear no relation to the later Babylonian *Indurans* proper.

## kur

The word *kur* in Sumerian has two separate meanings. One of these is mountain or more generally, the 'mountains' (especially the Zagros Mountains to the east of Mesopotamia). Because of this it can also refer to a 'foreign land' (other than Sumer) or in the plural to 'foreign countries', since the foreign countries with which Sumerians had to do, whether in war or in peace (if trade contacts, were above all those in or beyond the Zagros Mountains).

The second meaning of *kur* (which may be in origin a completely different word, a cognate of K1, 'earth') is 'earth, ground', and in particular *kur* is one of the names for the world under the ground we live on: the underworld or abode of the dead.

Although there are no grounds for positing a Sumerian belief that the underworld was located in the mountains, it was probably believed that the entrance to the *kur* (underworld) was located in the mountains to the east of Mesopotamia where the sun could be seen to emerge every morning. Certainly in some myths the mountains (*kur*) are treated as an

other-worldly locale in the same way as the underworld (*kur*) in other myths is an other world which deities try to visit or to obtain power over.

Labbur: see Tispaik.

## lahama

Among the creatures associated with the Sumerian god Enki are the 'fifty *lahama* of the *engur* (river is a synonym of *abzu*). They are among the creatures sent to try to recover the me from Inanna in the myth 'Inanna and Enki'. They were especially associated with the *abzu* and with brides, but it is not known in what form they were imagined.

A secondary use of the term *lahama* in Sumerian seems to refer to guardian figures (statues) which stood in the gateways of great temples such as the E-kur in Nippur or the E-ninnu at Ur. These are also sometimes called *lahama* of the *abzu*. Again it is not known in what form they were represented.

The word *lahama* is borrowed from Old Akkadian *lahamu* (probably meaning 'hair'). See Lahmu.



91 The god Lahmu ('Hair') more than holds his own with a fierce lion. Modern impression from rubbing a cylinder seal of the Neo-Babylonian Period. The inscription is a dedication of the seal 'for his life' to the god Nabû by one Nabu-erba-ilani, brewer for the temple of Marduk. Ht. 44 mm.

## Lahmu

- 1. Lahmu ('Hair') is the name of a protective and beneficent spirit originally associated with Enki Ea. Later associated with Marduk.
- 2. Figurines of the god, who was represented with long hair and beard tuften with four or six large curls were produced in the Neo-Assyrian Period as handguards to protect against demons and sickness. In art this figure (marginally termed the 'Nude Hero') is often closely associated with the demoniac bull-man.

In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, Lahmu and Lahamu are a male and female pair of primordial deities, see Anshar and Kishar. Their names are probably derived from the same root and do not mean 'muddy' as was formerly believed.

See lahama, lahuma under Tiamat's creatures: vase with streamers.

## lamu (lamassu)

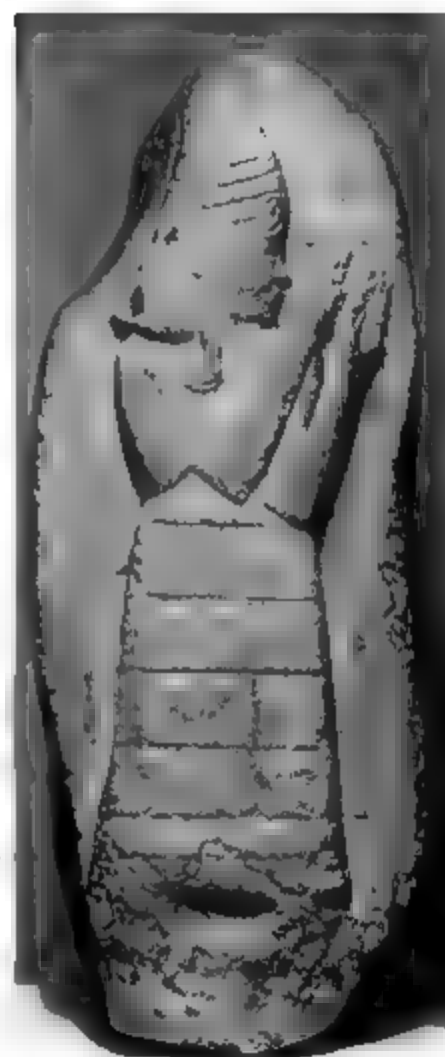
The Sumerian term *lamu* (Akkadian: *lamaynu*) refers to a beneficent protective human deity, imagined as human in form. Generally such a deity was a godmother (the corresponding male deity was called *alad*, Akkadian: *alad*).

In Neo-Sumerian, Old Babylonian, Elamite and Neo-Babylonian art such goddesses are depicted as a female composite form, usually introducing worshippers into the presence of important deities, and wearing a long, often flounced skirt, with one or both hands raised in supplication to the major god.

Later, the related term *aladlamaynu* (if that is the correct reading of the cuneiform) seems to have been used to designate the winged human headed bull and lion colossi which guarded the entrances of Assyrian palaces and temples. The corresponding winged female human-headed deities were called *apsaku* (see bulls and lions with human head).

## Lamasu

Although she is well described in modern works as a demoness, the writing of the name of Lamasu in cuneiform suggests that in Babylonian and Assyria she was regarded as a



92 A stone stele carved with the figure of a *lamassu*, one of a pair that probably flanked the entrance to a shrine. Kassite Period. Ht. 0.84 m.



act of hospitality is to offer cool water. However the very ancient practice of pouring drink offerings onto the ground may be connected with an idea of sacred wastefulness.

See animal sacrifice

### lightning (symbol)

The representation of a single lightning flash (zigzag line), found very rarely in the art of the Akkadian and Old Babylonian Periods, apparently gave way in the latter period to the double or triple-lightning fork which occurs thereafter until Neo-Babylonian times. It should be distinguished from the fork or trident. As is known from inscriptional evidence, it was at all times and in all regions a symbol of the storm god, whether Adad (Iškur) in Assyria or some localised deity. Sometimes it was held as an attribute by the god. On a famous monumental relief carving of the Neo-Assyrian Period, the god Ninurta ( ) holds triple-lightning symbols, perhaps because he has taken over a mythical role once attributed to Adad (see Asag).

See ring-staff

W. Forked lightning, symbol of the weather god.

Lil: see Sul-pa-e.

### lilitu

The male *lilu* and the two females *lilitu* and *arbat-lil* are a sort of family group of demons. They are not gods. The *lilu* haunts desert and open country and is especially dangerous to pregnant women and infants. The *lilitu* seems to be a female equivalent, while the *arbat-lil* (whose name means 'maiden *lilu*') seems to have the character of a frustrated bride, incapable of normal sexual activity. As such, she compensates by aggressive behaviour especially towards young men. The *arbat-lil*, who is often mentioned in magical texts, seems to have some affinities with the Jewish Lilith (e.g.

Isaiah 34:14). 'She is not a wife, a mother, she has not known happiness, has not undressed in front of her husband, has no milk in her breasts.' She is believed to cause impotence in men and sterility in women.

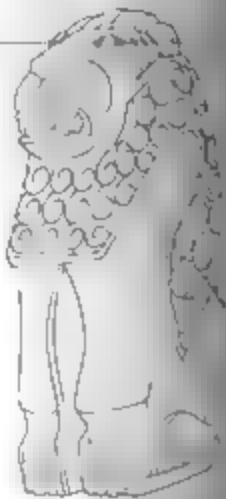
A plaque thought possibly to depict her shows a scorpion-tailed she-wolf about to devour a young girl.

See nude woman.

### lion

The last lion in Mesopotamia was killed in the twentieth century AD, although the exact date is disputed. Until the end of the third millennium BC lions were common throughout the country. Thereafter they are not much mentioned in southern Mesopotamia, although in the Middle Euphrates and in Assyria they remained such a nuisance that lion hunting, made famous by the Assyrian kings (see animal sacrifice), was a genuine necessity. In the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, the god discusses whether a plague of lions would not have been a more appropriate chastisement of mankind than the Flood.

In literature, the lion is a favourite metaphor for war, he kings and fierce deities, especially Ninurta or Išarra. A popular saying was 'He who seizes the tail of a lion will grow in the river, he who seizes the tail of a fox will be saved'.



97 This colossal stone lion originally stood in the temple of Enki at Eridu. It probably dates to the Neo-Sumerian Period. H. 64 cm.

As far as the Sumerians were concerned, the lion was grouped together with dogs and wolves as a canine, rather than as a feline. The Egyptian stone lions guarded the entrance to Enki's temple at Eridu and the famous lion of the Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud. In the Middle Euphrates, the lion was a fierce and dangerous animal, and it was a common sight to see a lioness with her cub in the den. In the Middle Euphrates, the lion was a fierce and dangerous animal, and it was a common sight to see a lioness with her cub in the den. In the Middle Euphrates, the lion was a fierce and dangerous animal, and it was a common sight to see a lioness with her cub in the den.

A standing lion surmounting a standard is depicted on Sumerian stone and on seal impressions of the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur. Since all the relevant material comes from the city of Girsu, the lion-standard has been regarded as an emblem of the god Ningirsu.

The lion is known in the Akkadian Period as the attribute of a goddess, usually a heavily armed deity, perhaps Ishtar (Inanna) in her guise as a warrior goddess. Monuments of the lion of King Assurnasirpal II of Assyria (reigned 883-859 BC) were destroyed by an assayer of the king placed at the entrance of the temple of the goddess Ishtar at Nimrud, and it is probable that the lion was also destroyed at the entrance of the temple of the goddess Ishtar at Nimrud. On the same relief, Marduk (Ninlil) is enthroned on a lion. The lion also seems at least in the Neo-Assyrian Period to have been associated with the goddess Dama (Damgalnuna).

98 A lion and a lioness standing on a base, from the temple of Marduk at Nimrud. The lion is the attribute of the goddess Ishtar, and the lioness is the attribute of the goddess Dama. The Middle Assyrian Period.

On a Cappadocian seal (that is, from the Old Assyrian trading colony in Anatolia), the lion is associated with a male deity who holds the fork emblem.

In the Neo-Assyrian Period, the natural lion is also a generally magically protective type, known as *argalia*. An evil demon who lay in wait in washrooms was envisaged in the form of a lion (see Neo-centaur).

The constellation called Lion corresponds to our constellation Leo (see zodiac).

See bulls and lions with human head

### lion-centaur

The so-called lion-centaur of Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian art is a hybrid creature with a lion's lower body (including all four legs), and the head, upper body and arms and hands of a man. He often wears the horned cap of divinity. The creature's name was *armaitallu*, 'arm-*ma*'.

Representations of him were placed outside ablutions rooms, where he fended off the attacks of the leonine demon *Ukai-tes-lennu*, 'lion attendant'.

See merman and mermaid.

### lion-demon

A human-headed hybrid figure with the head of a lion, upright ears (see donkey ears) and the feet of a bird is present in Mesopotamian art from the Old Assyrian Period (and with more leonine features from the Akkadian Period).

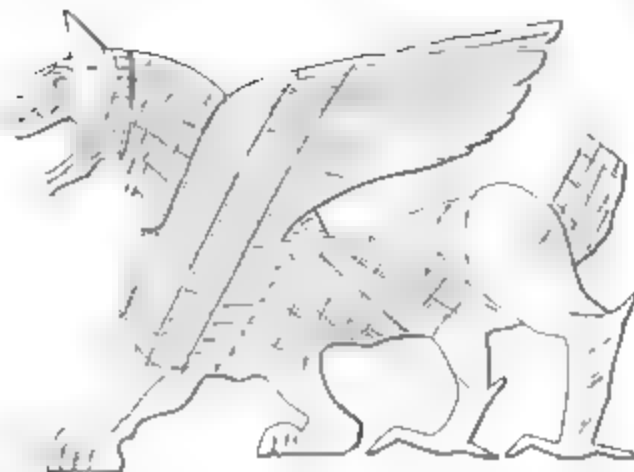






99. A lion-demon and a lion-centaur threaten and bite the winged evil forces. A monumental stone relief which stood in a niche in a room of the royal palace of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal (reigned 883-859 BC) at Nimrud. (H. 1.47 m)

in Assyria called  
lion-dragon or  
lion-centaur. It is  
the Assyrian name  
for the Lamassu.



period) until the Persian conquest, when it passed into Achaemenid and then Seleucid art. The demon most often (and always in the Assyrian manner) shows one hand with a sword and the other lowered, lance a mass. This one is generally naked. Usually he wears a short kilt. But when he is fully armed he has a full kilt. (H. 1.47 m)

At least in the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, the type of the lion-headed demon was used as a weather-creature, a beneficent one, the one that guards the gates of the palace and the temple. He is depicted on Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs and as figurines of terracotta, stone, or metal placed in houses or buried in the foundations (magical protection against evil demons and monsters). It is often associated with the figure of the Snouting god. On Old Babylonian seals, however, he often holds a man upside down by one leg, and is associated with the 'god with a molar' (probably the underworld god Nergal). It has been suggested therefore that at his early time he represents an agent of Nergal and is a bringer of disease.

#### lion-dragon

The lion-dragon is a lion with wings, horns, and a scorpion tail. Its head, legs, tail and wings

is represented from the Akkadian Period down to the Neo-Babylonian, including on an Assyrian wall relief from the Temple of Ninurta at Kalba (modern Samarra). As the creature is clearly male, suggested identifications as Lamassu and Ilumai can be distinguished. It is possible that the monster is the Asakku (Asakku) of the Akkadian (Indogut). A recent suggestion makes the creature sometimes the (female) storm-bringing (weather) beast, the animal of the god Iskur, this would account for the beast's wide open mouth. A slightly variant horned lion-dragon with scorpion tail is found in Neo-Assyrian art. On the rock reliefs, probably of Sennacherib, at Malta, three different gods stand upon such a beast (probably Assur, Sin (Nanna-Suen) and Adad (Iškur)).

See griffin

#### lion-fish

A motif on Old Babylonian seals is a figure with the head of a lion and the body of a fish. Its significance is unknown.

lion-garbed figure: see Lu-tarak and Lu-lal

lion-headed bird: see Imdugud







scholars, since the series are organised into and accompanied by directions for, complex rituals in which the sequence of actions and incantations is crucially important. The incantations have been gathered from various sources and woven into a ritual sequence in the belief that proliferation of the magic would make it more effective. A single example can be given: two copies of the 'same' ritual exist, separated by a thousand years, in which the number of paraphernalia required, in this case cylinder seals hung around the neck of the patient, has been increased from one to seven, evidently in the belief that the magic would thereby become the more powerful.

### magic circle

In magical rituals it is common to demarcate a circle by sprinkling a trickle of flour on the ground (Akkadian *surru* 'lit. magic flour' which makes a boundary). The patient or the patient's tomb to be treated may be surrounded by such a magic circle. Ritual actions are carried out inside the circle and magical figurines may be surrounded with a circle of flour. It is said that the power of the circle is such that certain demons cannot enter it, and in commentaries the circle is explained as symbolising extra-terrestrial deities.

In other rituals a magic circle might be painted in white ash or dark wash in the left and right of a doorway, for apotropaic purposes.

magical figurines: see building rites and deposits, demons and monsters, figurines.

Magillan-boat: see boat with human head, Shum Heroes

Maltese cross: see cross

Mami (Mama): see mother goddesses and birth goddesses.

Mamûn: see Nergal

### Mamu

An originally Sumerian deity, one of several associated with dreams (*maṣṣud* being the Sumerian word for 'dream'), Mamu was sometimes regarded as female (and a daughter of the god Enlil) and sometimes as male (and referred to as god of dreams). When Assurnasirpal II of Assyria (reigned 883-859 BC) refurbished the town of Inqur Enlil (modern Basra) he built a temple there to a god whose name is written in the same way, possibly an origin a local deity with a similar name.

### Marduk

The god Marduk was the patronal god of the city of Babylon from at least as early as the Third Dynasty of Ur. His worship is attested as early as the Early Dynastic Period, although nothing further is known of his origin. The conventional writing of his name with the sign meaning literally 'bull-calf' (of) the sun is probably a popular etymology. Later in Marduk was often known simply as Ek (Elam).

Quite early on, Marduk seems to have absorbed the personality of a local deity of the Eridu region, Asarlûti, who was regarded as a son of Enki; consequently Marduk became the apotropaic Ek. Marduk's great shrine was the temple called Esagil at Babylon, where he was worshipped together with his wife Sarpanitu. Occasionally the goddess Nanaya was treated as his wife. Nabu, worshipped in nearby Borsippa, became in due course the son of Marduk.

The rise of the cult of Marduk is closely connected with the political rise of Babylon from city state to the capital of an empire. From the Kassite Period Marduk became more and more important until it was possible for the author of the Babylonian Epic of Creation to maintain that not only was Marduk king of all the gods but that many of the latter were no more than aspects of his persona — hence the hymn of the Fifty Names of Marduk, incorporated into the Epic, in which a contemporary list of gods adds sixty-six more.

Marduk was also a popular god in Assyria from about the fourteenth century BC. Because

of his supreme position, it is difficult to identify specific traits in his character, but magic and wisdom (derived from his connection with Asarlûti, water and vegetation (connected with his father Enki) and judgement (suggesting a connection with the sun god Šamaš) can be adduced. In the reign of Sennacherib (704-681 BC) however some aspects of Marduk's cult, mythology and rituals were attributed to the Assyrian state god Assur.



105 The god Marduk and his snake dragon (bašmu). Detail from a large lapis lazuli cylinder dedicated to Marduk by the Babylonian king Marduk-zakir-paṣṣi (reigned 721-703 BC). The fragment shows a portion of a cuneiform inscription, with the word 'MARDUK' clearly visible in large, bold letters. The fragment is irregularly shaped and appears to be a detail from a larger object.

The worship of Marduk in its most extreme form has been compared with monotheism, but it never led to a denial of the existence of other gods, or to the exclusion of female deities.

In the Epic of Erra (see Nergal), when the god Erra wants to unseat Marduk so that temporarily he, Erra, can rule the world, Marduk is presented, possibly with humorous intent, in a very uncharacteristic form as a humbling old incompetent whose insignia need repairing and cleaning.

Marduk's symbol of a triangular-headed spade or hoe, the *marzu*, may possibly reflect an origin of the god as a local agricultural deity. The snake-dragon (*mušḫuššu*) as animal of Marduk and Nabu was taken over from Tishpak, local god of Ešnunna, possibly soon after the conquest of that city by Hammurabi of Babylon.

See New Year ceremonies: Sacred Marriage

*marzu*, see Marduk, spade (symbol).

### Martu (Amurru)

The god Martu (Akkadian Amurru) is a god who descends from the desert and rules over the land like a storm. He was regarded as a son of An, and was sometimes said to be a son of Ninurta. According to some traditions his wife was Belet-šeri (Lady of the Desert) or else Asratu. There seems little doubt that he represents a personification of the nomadic peoples of the desert who began to appear on the horizon of settled Mesopotamia at least as early as the later third millennium BC, originally from the west, but gradually infiltrating the Mesopotamian area so that they also occupied lands to the east in the foothills of the Zagros. The first waves of these people were called Martu in Sumerian, and we tend to use the Ugaritic term Amurites.

The name of the god Martu, or Amurru, is used in personal names from the end of the third millennium BC.

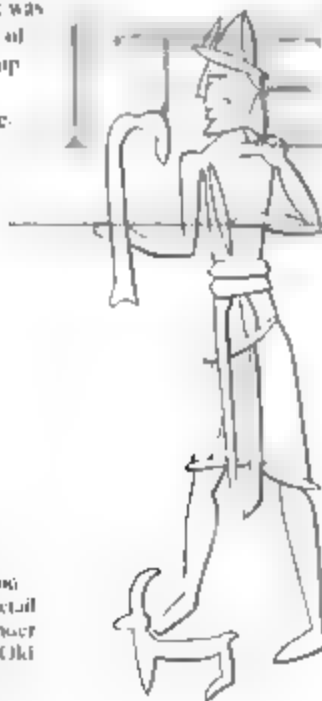
In a Sumerian poem called 'The Marriage of Martu' the laughter of the god Ninmesarra, patron god of the city Kazalla in southern

Babylonia, insists on marrying Maria even though he digs up truffles in the foothills, eats raw flesh, and has no permanent home – a partially accurate description of a desert nomad even today. The poem clearly indicates an attempt to absorb this god of the nomads into the general pantheon of Mesopotamia. The metaphor of a storm was frequently employed to describe the incursions of these people who 'knew nothing of agriculture'.

106 In Old Babylonian and early Kassite art, Amurru is represented as a god in long robes who carries a crook or a scimitar, and is sometimes associated with a gazelle. Chronologically the occurrence of this figure in art corresponds roughly with his flourishing at the god's cult in Babylonia, and the figure of a man with a crooked stick might be thought an appropriate form for a god of travelling nomads.

In Akkadian *amurru* continued to be used as the normal word for 'west'. It was also a name of the star group Perseus.

See also:



106 The god Amurru. Detail from a cylinder seal of the Old Babylonian Period.

*maskim*: see demons and monsters

*me*

The Sumerian term *me* (pronounced *ma*, rendered by Akkadian *par(a)*) is a plural, inanimate noun, and expresses a very basic concept in Sumerian religion. The *me* are properties or powers of the gods which enable a whole host of activities central to civilised human life, especially religion, to take place. A related term, *giš-bur* ('plan, design'), denotes how these activities ought, ideally, to be: the *me* are the powers which make possible the implementation of the *giš-bur* and which ensure the continuation of civilised life. They are ancient, enduring, holy, valuable. Most of them are held by An or Enlil, but they can be assigned or given to other gods of, by implication, lesser rank. Some *me* are concerned in very concrete terms – the throne of kingship (symbolising the activity of kingship) or a temple drum (symbolising the performance of ritual music) – and consequently are sometimes said to be carried 'born' or 'on'. In times of crisis, application of the *me* may be 'expensive'. For example, if gathered together and stood in a corner in the poem *Inana and Enki*, the 70 gods gambled drunkenly over the *me*, and Inana won them all from her father Enki.

*melam*: see diseases and medicine

*melam* and *ni*

*Melam* and *ni* are two Sumerian words which are often linked. Strictly speaking *ni* seems to denote the effect on human beings of the divine power *melam* (Akkadian *melammu*). The Babylonians used various words to capture the idea of *ni*, including *puluhim*, 'fear'. The exact connotation of *melam* is difficult to grasp. It is a brilliant, visible glamour which is evoked by gods, heroes, sometimes by kings, and also by temples of great holiness and by gods, symbols and emblems. While it is in some ways a phenomenon of light, *melam* is at the same time terrifying, awe-inspiring. As can be experienced as a physical creeping of the flesh. Both Sumerian and Akkadian are rich in words to

describe this phenomenon and its effects. Gods are sometimes said to 'wear' their *melam* like a garment or a crown, and like a garment or a crown, *melam* can be 'taken off'. If a god is killed (see dead gods), his *melam* disappears. While it is always a mark of the supernatural, *me* are *ni* are a combination of moral value, demons and magic.

*Mene*: see Gula

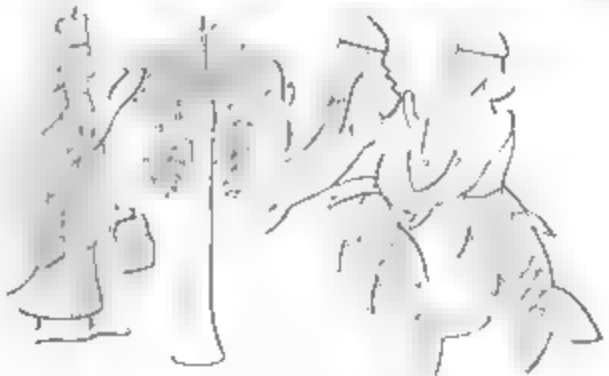
*merman and mermaid*

A figure with the head, arms and torso of a man

107 A swimming merman. Detail from a monumental stone relief from the royal palace of the Assyrian king Sargon II (reigned 722–705 BC) at Dur-Sukken (near Khorsabad). Ht. of figure approx.



108 A twisted tree flanked by a 'fish-armed figure' and a man and woman. Detail from a stone relief of a Neo-Assyrian Period.



but with the lower body and tail of a fish exists in most versions of Mesopotamian art from Old Babylonian times onwards. In the Middle Assyrian Period he may have been displaced by the analogously composed lion-centaur, but it so he was revived as a popular figure in Neo-Assyrian times. Continuing into the Achaemenid and Seleucid Periods, the figure is perhaps the prototype for the merman figure in Greek and medieval European art and literary tradition. To the Assyrians, the creature was known simply as *kalullu*, 'fish-man', and with the *giriballu* (scorpion-man) and



110 The scribal god Nabu holding his wedge-shaped writing stylus and standing on his snake-dragon. (The god's eye is illustrated on the original and is restored in this drawing.) He is from a clay-copper or bronze amulet, the place of the Neo-Assyrian Period.



became supreme god of Babylonia alongside Marduk. In Neo-Assyrian times his worship was accepted in Assyria too and he almost became an 'Assyrian' god in the reigns of Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) and Assurbanipal (668-c.627 BC).

A symbol of Nabu is a single wedge, vertical or horizontal, possibly a writing stylus, sometimes resting on a clay tablet. Occasionally this, or the god himself, is shown ruling on the back of a snake-dragon.

The worship of Nabu was long-lived and spread outside Mesopotamia among expatriate communities of Aramaic speakers in Egypt and Anatolia during the fourth century BC. By the time of Augustus a Mesopotamian pan-

theon of gods including Nabu was being worshipped in central and northern Syria or Palmyra and Dura Europos, and survived into at least the second century AD. In pre-Islamic Mesopotamia, Nabu's cult continued and he was identified by the Greeks with Apollo.

See Arabian gods, Dilmunite gods, Enzag, Ezida, Sacred Marriage

### Nammu

Nammu was a goddess who was considered, in some traditions, to have given birth to En (heaven) and Ki (earth) and to many more of the more ancient gods. Especially she was regarded as the mother of Enki. She came to be thought of as one of the mother goddesses.

Her name is written with the same sign as enkur, a synonym of abzu, and it is probable that she was originally a personification of the subterranean ocean.

Namtiash: see Nanna-Suen

### Nannar

Nannar or Nannaru was a minor deity who acted as minister of Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld. In one tradition he was the offspring of Enlil and Ninlil. The same name was also given to one of the demons of the nether regions, a harbinger of death. Originally Sumerian *nannar* meant 'vesting of the

### Nanaya

The goddess Nanaya, who seems to have shared some of the sexual aspects of Inana, was worshipped together with her daughter Kamsara (Akkadian *Lur-amassa*) and Inana at Uruk in a sort of trinity of goddesses at Uruk and later at Kis. During the Old Babylonian Period. Later Nanaya's name was used in incantations to denote little more than another aspect of Inana-Kiur.

See Sacred Marriage

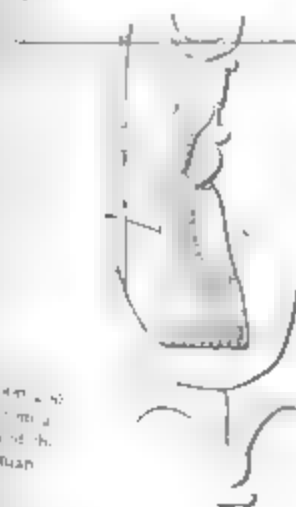
Nanibgal: see Ennugi, Nisaba

### Nanna-Suen (Sin)

In ancient Mesopotamia both the sun and the moon were male deities. In Sumerian, the sun goddess was called *Sin* or *Nanna* (Nannar) and sometimes also *Suen* (called by both names together, *Nanna-Suen*). In Akkadian, *Suen* was preferred. Other names included *Ushshur* (Shamash, 'Who shines forth') and *Ishtarur* (Nan). Whose name refers to the rising and setting of the moon). His name is also written simply with the number 30, the number of days in a lunar month.

Nanna was the son of Enlil and Ninlil. The son of Enlil's rape of the young goddess is said in a Sumerian poem. Enlil was banished to the other side but Ninlil followed him, and she became pregnant with Nanna. Nanna's wife was the goddess Ninsal, and their children were Uru, the son, and the goddess Inana.

His most important shrine was at Ur, but another cult centre which became of great importance in the Neo-Babylonian Period was his temple at Harran. In southern Babylonia, where the name of the god was worshipped together with his son, Enlil, as his son. The temple at Harran was of the type of the temple of the god Enlil at Uruk. The temple at Harran was of the type of the temple of the god Enlil at Uruk.



The moon and sun deity, Nanna-Suen, is shown in this drawing. The figure is standing, wearing a long, pleated robe. The figure's head is covered by a large, rounded, dome-like structure. The figure's arms are outstretched, and the figure's legs are also outstretched. The figure is standing on a base.

reigned 556-539 BC), whose mother was a priestess there. Nabu-na'id made his daughter high priestess of Sin at Ur.

Although a very popular deity in Old Babylonian times, Nanna always remained subordinate to the chief gods of the pantheon, and in 'Nanna-Suen's Journey to Nippur', he travels by barge to Nippur to obtain the blessing of the god Enlil (see journeys and processions of the gods).

A symbol of Nanna was a recumbent crescent moon. His beast was a bull or a lion-dragon.

See Arabian gods, 'omega' symbol.

### Nanse

The Sumerian goddess Nanse belongs to the local pantheon of the city-state of Lagash in south-east Sumer (see local gods). Her temple was located at a small town near Lagash. She was regarded as a daughter of Enlil, but also as the sister of Ningirsu (the local form of Ninurta) and Nisaba in a parallel tradition. Her husband was Sindara and her minister Hender-  
Nanse was especially associated with divination and the interpretation of dreams, and with birds and fishes. In an extant Sumerian hymn addressed to her, she is also praised as a benefactor of the socially disadvantaged and as responsible for checking the accuracy of weights and measures.

See Dama

Naradu: see Seven (gods).

necromancy: see divination

### Nergal (Erra)

The gods Nergal and Erra were originally separate deities, but later became so closely identified as to lose their independent characters. Since Nergal was worshipped at the temple called E-meslam (or 'Meslam House') at Kuth in Babylonia, he was also sometimes known under the name Meslama-ea, 'he who comes forth from the Meslam'; later he was also identified with Lugul-urra. Another cult centre was Maskan-Sapir (Tell Abu Dhawar).



Nergal was associated with the underworld and was usually regarded as the husband of Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld. Their love story is related in the myth Nergal and Ereshkigal. Other goddesses sometimes regarded as the wife of Nergal were Ishtar and Mannû. Nergal was considered to be a son of Enlil and Ninlil, or else of Bellety.

In addition to his underworld connections, Nergal was also associated with forest fires, lepers and magpies, and sometimes had a warlike aspect.

Erra was, especially, a violent warlike god, particularly responsible for plagues. He, too, was worshipped at the E-meslam at Kish, with his wife Nin (probably the same as Nergal's wife Mammit), and not the Mann-wares counted among other goddesses and birth goddesses). Erra's father was said to be An.

In the Babylonian poem 'Ishtar and Erra' the god acquires temporary control of the world and (apparently) because excessive rain is simply in his nature, rather than to punish any sin, ravages and lays waste Babylon at the mythical narrative may mirror descriptions of his country, he were the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in by tribal, nomadic peoples such as the Yamaya or Samians.

In Babylonian art Nergal is represented as a god dressed in a long open ~~coat~~ <sup>tunic</sup> and ~~with one leg bare~~ <sup>with one leg bare and</sup> advanced, his foot often placed upon a raised support or trampling a man. He usually carries a scepter and a single- or double-headed iron sceptre which, as independent emblems, also serve to symbolize the god (see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods). A god shown at rest ~~in a~~ <sup>in</sup> a coffin may also be Nergal (see dead gods).

In the Etruscan period, Nergal was identified with the Greek Herakles.

See Arabian gods, fly, lion-demon.

### New Year ceremonies

The New Year ceremonies were celebrated at Babylon from the first to the twelfth of Nisannu, the first month of the year which fell approximately at the time of the spring equinox. The ceremonies at Babylon were



112 A good apparently lying in his sarcophagus  
thought by some scholars to be Nergal god of the  
underworld. Black clay figurine possibly a  
king or a god Old Babylonian date 1800-1600

...in the cult of Marduk, but related  
...and been performed for a  
...annual performance at  
...the end  
...Marduk was

3. Anna... 17. ...

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See your publication agent for details

Washita and Washita

night  
in [redacted] was believed that  
[redacted] took the [redacted]  
with a gateway [redacted] into  
the [redacted] where he spent the night in the morning.

ing he emerged from a corresponding cave at the eastern horizon. It is clear that his entrance was believed to diminish the night-time hours, but it is not yet quite clear how this view can be harmonised with another tradition that he illuminated the underworld during the night.

Certain rituals had to be performed during the night. These included extispicy rituals and, especially, magical rituals intended to destroy the power of sorcerers and some *hauhinahau* rituals (see *magic and sorcery*). Because of this, such rituals often included special prayers addressed to the (unnamed) gods of the night, or to the stars.

Nikkal see Norngul

## Abstract

In Genesis 10, we read that Nimrod was 'a mighty hunter before the Lord', and that 'the beginning of his kingdom was Babel [Babylon] and Erech [Iraq], and Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar'. The context suggests that Nimrod was a deity for the Babylonian nation. Nimrod survives as a figure in Islamic tradition and is perpetuated as legendary heroes of the sons of Kalhu (Nimrod) and Borsippa (the Nimrod). However, an Mesopotamian source for a legend can be found here.

## \input{main.tex}

The god Ninazu was regarded as a son of Enkigal, queen of the underworld; he was also the father of Ninkiszida. His connection appears to be with the underworld. It seems that during the third millennium BC he was worshipped at the city of Umma, but that his cult was later replaced there by that of the god Išpāk (in origin the Hurrian storm god, Išup). Ninazu's divine beast seems to have been the snake-dragon (*mukkušu*), apparently taken over by Išpāk and so later by Marduk.

It is possible that the Nuzuzu who was worshipped at Enece in southern Sumer, whose father was Enlil, was a different god.

Nindara see local gods, Nanso

1.3 A diorite statue of the goddess Ningal of the Isin-Larsa Period, found in the *gipar* at U<sub>r</sub>, and heavily restored. (When found the statue was headless and very broken.) The inscription is a dedication of the statue to Ningal by En-ana-tuma, daughter of King Išme-Dagan of Isin.



### Ningal

The goddess Ningal was the wife of the god Nanna-Sin and the mother of the sun god Utu-Samas. She was worshipped with Sin at U<sub>r</sub> and also at Sin's sanctuaries at Harran in northern Syria. Her cult developed independently in Syria as early as the second millennium BC, where her name was altered to Nikkal, a form which is also used in Babylonia sometimes. The cult of Nikkal seems to have lasted in Syria well into the first millennium AD.

See 'eyes-of-Ningal'

Ningilim: see mongilose

### Ningirsu

The god Ningirsu (whose name means 'Lord of Girsu') was important from the Early Dyna-

astic Period until the Old Babylonian Period as a local form of the god Ninurta (see local pantheon of the city-state of Lagas, within whose borders the town of Girsu (modern Tellu) lay, where he was regarded as a son of Enlil, the husband of Bau and brother of the goddesses Nanshe and Ninaba.

Ningirsu was the god for whom Gudea, ruler of Lagas, rebuilt the great temple E-ninnu, 'House of the Fifty [one]' (see numbers), celebrated in a lengthy Sumerian hymn. In the hymn, Gudea dreams that Ningirsu appears before him commanding the rebuilding: instead of appearing in human form, the god appears as the lion-headed Indugud (Anzu) bird (see dreams and visions). Since in the older versions of the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* poem, it is Ningirsu who defeats the *Larv* when the bird has stolen from Enlil the tablet of destinies (while the later versions have Ninurta as the divine avenger), it is possible to see how what must originally have been a version – a 'toponym' – of the god later became so closely identified with him as to be able to stand as a symbol for the divine presence.

Also alluded to in Gudea's hymn is the myth of the *Sîn* Heroes, a group of heroic warriors – some anthropomorphic, some monstrous and some animate – conquered by Ningirsu (or in other versions, Ninurta).

In general Ningirsu was, on the one hand, a warrior god, as the above exploits suggest; on the other hand, he was associated with the fruitfulness of cultivation and vegetation, with the regulation of canals essential for irrigation and with fecundity. On kudurrus of the Kassite Period, the plough is named as his symbol.

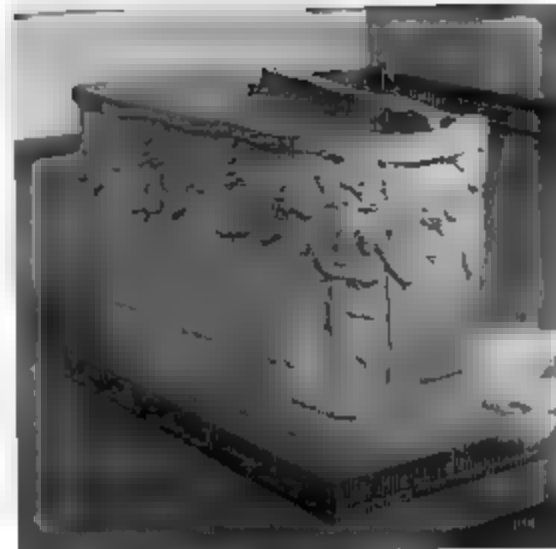
As Girsu became less important (being absorbed into the empire of the Third Dynasty of U<sub>r</sub>), less is heard of Ningirsu, and his attributes were attributed to Ninurta.

See also: Zababa.

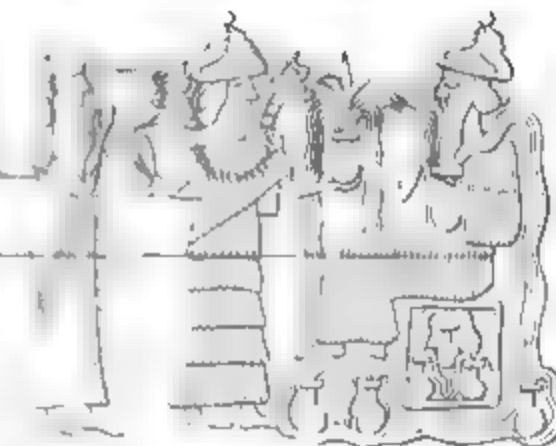
### Ningisida

The god Ningisida was an underworld deity, son of the god Ninazu. His name was etymologically mean 'Lord of the Good Tree'

in the Sumerian poem 'The Death of Gilgamesh'. Gilgamesh meets Ningisida and Dumuzi together in the underworld. (Babylonian translation: 'Ningisida as a dead man, his demons are with him'). The god's name is also mentioned in a Sumerian poem of Dumuzi. In Gudea's hymn, a ruler of Lagas who built the temple of Ningirsu, regarded



as a personal protective deity (see personal gods), and recorded his appearance to him in a dream.



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Ningisida as a personal protective deity (see personal gods), and recorded his appearance to him in a dream.

Unexpectedly, in the myth of Adapa, the sage who travelled to heaven, we encounter Dumuzi and a god called Anzida, certainly an abbreviated form of Ningisida, guarding the gate to the Heaven of Anu (An), the highest heaven (see cosmology). Adapa is told that he



above the level of his head to the ground. Often he stands upon a podium. Commonly in temples (of various deities) of this period, a figurine of sun-dried clay of the god in this form would be buried in a brick box beneath the base of the cult statue. The Old Babylonian figure with mace (see mace) has been regarded as an earlier iconography of the god but it seems doubtful.

The animal symbol of Ninsabur/Papsuka at least from the Kassite Period, was a walking bird.

### Ninsabur (goddess)

A minor female deity who functioned as minister (see gods and goddesses) to Inana.

See Ninurta.

### Ninmug: see Gula

Ninru: see mother goddesses and birth goddesses

### Ninur: see Ninursaga

### Ninurta

There is no evidence for the meaning of the name of the god Ninurta, whose worship was very ancient in Sumer. As a son of Enlil, his principal cult centre was the temple at Nippur.

As at Nippur. His wife was regarded as either Gula or because of his close association with the god Ningirsu Bau. Indeed, the personalities of the two gods Ninurta and Ningirsu are closely intertwined and, although his name may have been independent, in historical times Ningirsu was a local form of Ninurta.

The most pronounced aspect of Ninurta's personality was his warlike nature. Several myths relate his martial exploits, mainly directed against the enemies of Sumer and in particular against the so-called 'rebel lands' (the regions in the mountains to the east of Mesopotamia). Ninurta (or Ningirsu) is the gods' champion against the Anuhiru (Indugud) when it steals the tablet of destinies from Enlil (the rebels endangering the stability of civilization. Ninurta (or Ningirsu) kills the Slain Heroes in a myth several times alluded to but nowhere presented in full).

A contrasting aspect, also to be found with Ningirsu, is Ninurta's role as a farmer god. In the so-called Sumerian Calendar Ninurta gives detailed advice on the cultivation of crops and preparation of the fields, in fact on the farmer's activities throughout the year. The plough is mentioned as a symbol of Ninurta in Kassite kudurrus, and so perhaps represents Ninurta in Neo-Assyrian art. Another symbol

of Ninurta in the Neo-Assyrian Period was a griffin-headed bird.

The two aspects, warrior and farmer, are combined in the Sumerian poem *Lugal-e* in which Ninurta succeeds in defeating the griffin demon Asag and his army of stone men, and then proceeds to irrigate the world, using the stones to build the mountains in such a way that streams and lakes flow into the Tigris and Euphrates to make them useful for irrigation and to facilitate agriculture.

The Assyrian kings were devoted to the cult of Ninurta, as a warlike god who would help them against their enemies. At his new capital (modern Nimrud), Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 B.C.) had a temple to Ninurta adjacent to the ziggurat (which may also have been dedicated to Ninurta). The scene carved on stone relief slabs at either side of the main doorway of the temple may represent, uniquely in Neo-Assyrian monumental art, a mythological scene: Ninurta's defeat of the Anuhiru (Indugud) or else of the rebel bird (Indugud).

According to one theory, the winged eagle-headed figure (see eagle) of the Assyrian art of the 9th century B.C. is a symbol of Ninurta, related to Assyrian Ninurta (Lugal-e). This idea based upon the resemblance of a bird and eagle to the eagle-headed figure, which has a bird's tail seen from the side, but no definite support among scholars.

See bird gods; lightning (symbol); Nin-burta; Ninroch; rainbow; Slain Heroes; Uruk (god); Uruk (goddess); Zababa.

Ninroch: see snake gods

### Nisaba

One of the group of signs used in writing her name (a pictograph of an ear of grain) shows it is most likely that the goddess Nisaba was in fact a grain goddess. The form of the name Nisaba (or Nisaba) is more correct than Nisaba.

The cult of this daughter of An and Uruk is attested from Early Dynastic times. Nisaba was, or became, a goddess of writing, accounting and scribal knowledge. At Lagash

she was a member of the local pantheon of that area (see local gods), where she was regarded as a daughter of Enlil and hence a sister of Ningirsu. The god Haya was her husband, but later, probably because of her association with the scribal art, Nisaba (also a scribal deity) was said to be her spouse. She was also sometimes identified with the goddess Nanihgal (see Ennugi).

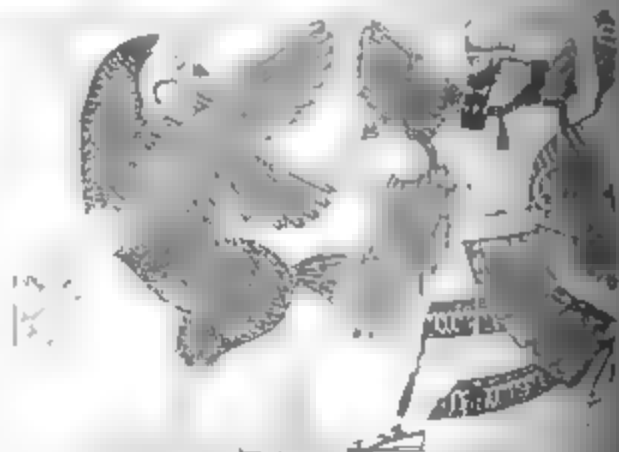
In the Early Dynastic Period, Nisaba was a personal goddess of the rulers of the Sumerian city of Umma. Later, however, during the Isin-Larsa Period, she was regarded as patron goddess of the city of Eresh. The goddess of nearby Suruppak, Sud (see Ninlil), was regarded as her daughter. In the myth 'Enlil and Sud', when Enlil, god of Nippur, wishes to marry Sud, he has to seek the approval of Nisaba.

### Ninroch

The Assyrian king Sennacherib was murdered in 705 B.C. apparently by Arad-Mullissu and another of his sons (they had been passed over for succession in favour of Esarhaddon). According to the famous account (2 K. 19, 35; also Chronicles 32, 21 and 37 and Job 1), Sennacherib was killed while worshipping in the temple of his god, 'Ninroch'. It is not clear to which Assyrian god this refers. It has been suggested that it is a corruption of Ninurta, but this is unsubstantiated.

When in the nineteenth century AD Sir Austen Henry Layard excavated the palace of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II (ruled 883-859 B.C.) at the city of Kalhu (modern Nimrud), he discovered large numbers of bas-reliefs which depicted images of a winged eagle-headed figure. Referring these to the Biblical story, Layard labelled the figures 'Ninroch' (in view of Ninurta's supposed character as a bird god). As a monumental figure-type in the palace the eagle-headed man is now known not to be present as late as the reign of Sennacherib, the term 'Ninroch' is also occasionally found in modern art historical literature for this figure, otherwise known as the griffin-demon.

17 A mythological scene on a monumental stone tablet from the temple of the god Ninurta at Kalhu (modern Nimrud), belonging to the reign of the Assyrian king Assurnasirpal II (ruled 883-859 B.C.). Ninurta or Anu pursues a leonine bird-monster, perhaps the Anuhiru or Asagku.



Nude Hero: see Lahnmu

## nude woman

Land made clay figurines of nude females appear in Mesopotamia in prehistoric times, but have applied and painted features. Figurines of nude women impressed from a pottery or stone mould first appear at the beginning of the second millennium BC. Though the postures vary slightly, the figurines are in most respects similar and probably were mass-produced. It is very unlikely that they represent a universal mother goddess, although they may have been intended to promote fertility. Possibly the same idea was responsible for a related group of female figures breast-feeding infants.

Early second-millennium BC seals and clay figurines commonly depict a full-frontal nude female. Often she stands on a plinth as if representing a cult statue. The figure never wears the horned cap of divinity, but she sometimes appears to be the object of worship. It has been suggested that she represents Ishtar (Inana) in her aspect as goddess of sexual love (see prostitution and ritual sex) or, according to another theory, the goddess Salia.

In Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art,

Ishtar is standing naked female who does wear a horned cap and is often winged in ancient Assyrian art as goddess of sex (although the more menacing renderings of her type have been associated by some as representations of the demoness Lahnmu).

Nudimmud: see Enki

## numbers

Some numbers acquire special religious or magical significance for essentially mathematical reasons. Three, for instance, has always been regarded as important because of its magical usefulness and its perfection: three points can be arranged graphically such that each point is equidistant from the others. Alternatively, if one point is taken as the centre, the other two can be placed equidistantly on either side of it. Thus the world was divided by the Babylonians into three superimposed regions, heaven, earth and underworld, with the earth in the middle. The heaven was divided horizontally into three regions, as was the otherwise cosmology of the eastern horizon was divided vertically into three bands, the ways of Anu (Enki, Enlil and Ea (Enki)) see astrology and astronomy.

The earlier, Sumerian, cosmology of the rectangular field-shaped earth with five 'corners' was probably the origin of the four directions and four winds (usually enumerated in the order south, north, east and west).

As for Neo-Assyrian foundation figurines, two sets of five model dogs (two of each color) were deposited.

If for the most significant number in the ancient Mesopotamians was seven. It is difficult to see what the origin of this significance may have been. The group of gods called the Seven (gods) were equated with the Pleiades (conventionally seven in number). In magic incantations must often be repeated seven times, seven demons expelled, seven evils removed. In ritual actions are carried out seven (or sometimes seven times seven) times, seven cylinder seals are hung round the neck of a patient, and so on. There are seven (or fourteen) gates to the

underworld. Seven in some of these contexts may be replaced by eight. Sometimes 'seven' or 'eight' is used to indicate an indefinite number. There were eleven Slain Heroes, and human creatures were also eleven in number.

Seven is used simply to indicate a number. The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh begins with a hymn to the Fates, goddesses of fate.

Since the human body is a sacred thing, the number of counting must be a sacred thing. In particular the number 600 (60), for which the word was 'six' (sar), and on occasion 120, were also used to express particularly large numbers – much as we use 'hundreds', 'thousands' or 'millions'.

Numbers were sometimes used to write the names of the most important deities, as (Sumer), 30 (Sin), 40 (Ishtar) and 50 (Enlil).

## Ninurta

The god Ninurta was especially associated with the bow. He was the northern Babylonian counterpart of the Sumerian god Ninkurta. He was the son of Enlil and Ninlil, and was the husband of the goddess Ishtar. He was the patron of the city of Nippur, and was the patron of the city of Nippur. He was the patron of the city of Nippur, and was the patron of the city of Nippur.

He was the patron of the city of Nippur, and was the patron of the city of Nippur. He was the patron of the city of Nippur, and was the patron of the city of Nippur.

## Nungal

The goddess Nungal (or Manungal) was a daughter of Enlil and Ninlil, and a deity of the underworld. The minor god Inlilum, a son of Enlil, was considered to be her husband. She was especially associated with the temple of Enlil at Nippur. She was worshipped during the late third and early second millennium BC at a number of cities, and was a member of the local pantheon of Lagash (see local gods). Later she was identified with Antinoya (see Gula).

## Nusku

The god Nusku (perhaps to be read Nuska) was regarded both as a sun god, and as the minister of Enlil. In a variant tradition he is described in a Sumerian hymn as a son of Enlil and Ninlil, who are also included as ancestors of Enlil in an account of a descent. Enlil's speak-eg. apart from his functions as minister, Nusku has an independent character as a god associated with fire and light. Sometimes Enlil, the fire god, is considered as the son of Nusku. In magical incantations, Nusku is among the gods called upon to assist in the burning of sorcerers and witches (see magic and sorcery).

In the Neo-Assyrian Period, Nusku was among the gods who were worshipped together at Harran in north-west Syria (see Nungal), and at this time he seems to have acquired an importance out of all proportion to his relatively humble beginnings. At Harran he was regarded as the son of the principal deity there, Sin (Sanna-Suen). This group of deities was probably worshipped by a largely Aramaic population, and Nusku is probably the same as the name Nushu found in Neo-Assyrian personal names, and in the god written 'Nusku' in the Assyrian inscriptions. These cults appear to have flourished for centuries AD and perhaps even longer.

The symbol of a lamp sometimes occurring in the Assyrian art from the Kassite to Neo-Babylonian Periods is labelled on kudurrus as an emblem of Nusku.

Oannes: see Hermoon, fish-gorbed figure; Seven Sages.

## oaths and curses

In any society it is normal to solemnise statements, evidence or agreement by oaths, and to penalise those who break or go back on their oath. In the highly developed litigious world of ancient Mesopotamia, oaths were used especially in the legal sphere, as well as in treaties and political agreements, in oaths of declarations of all kinds. It was normal to swear by the 'life' of one or more gods, and, especially in the period when kings were deified (see dedication of

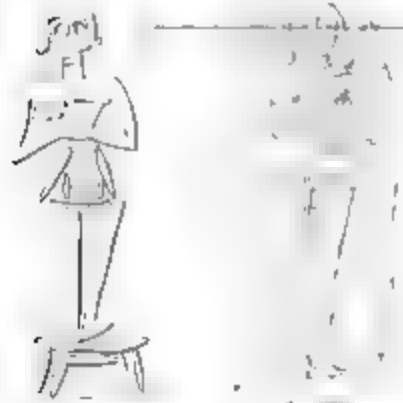


Fig. 118 A woman in the nude, standing on a plinth. (left) a detail from a cylinder seal, and (right) in relief on a baked clay plaque from Larsa. Old Babylonian Period.

kings), also (or instead) by the king: in early Assyria also by the city (of Assur). In some legal cases, especially concerning boundary disputes or other matters which could not literally be brought to court, it was common to bring to the disputed site from the temple an emblem of the god, such as the saw of Samāš (Utu), and for the parties to swear on the spot in its presence. Swearing by gods was also common in magical conjurations, where long lists of gods were invoked in the exorcism of demons (see *magic and sorcery*).

Dire physical and psychological penalties were inflicted for those who broke oaths. It was believed that the very swearing of an oath, and even more so the breaking of an oath, generated supernatural powers which might turn against the swearer and from which he needed to be protected by magic. For this reason the oath (*namma*) is included in the list of potentially dangerous acts which a psychologically disturbed person might have inadvertently committed, causing his disturbance. Plaque depicting the goddess Lammaštu (also in their inscriptions to the altars) of a demon called Mamta, clearly a personification of the oath, and suggest that the causal sickness or demonic possession was thought to have been, in this case, a broken oath; it has been suggested that the symbols of the gods shown in the uppermost register of such plaques are a visual metaphor for the original oath. (See *demons and monsters, diseases and medicine*.)

Equally dire and explicit curses were invoked upon those who committed social crimes; in particular ample evidence survives of the curses invoked on those who damaged inscribed monuments erected by rulers, or stone monuments recording grants of land (tenure (*kudurru*)). The curses are written out on the monuments for any later reader to peruse and to think twice about: 'May the god Assur overthrow his sovereignty, smash his weapons, defeat his army, diminish his borders, decree the end of his reign, darken his days, vitiate his years, and destroy his name and his seed from the land.'

See *Salmu*.

offering: see *boats of the gods; fish; sacrifice and offering*.

oil: see *anointing; divination; libation*.

### 'omega' symbol

A symbol approximating in form to an upright or inverted capital Greek letter omega, but with a number of minor variations, is first attested on an impression from an Early Dynastic seal, and is represented commonly from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Babylonian Periods. It has variously been interpreted by modern commentators as a representation of weighing scales, the yoke of a chariot pole, a cornet, a large-horned quadruped, a head-band, a ring, the hands used to swaddle a babe, or as the uterus. Supporters of the last two suggestions usually connect the symbol with the mother goddess Ninurta, or with Nintu (see *mother goddesses and birth goddesses*). Some, probably Assyrian or Old Babylonian Period plaques of clay with rounded relief show a goddess (probably Nintu) flanked by inverted omega motifs beneath which a human form resembling newborn babies and newly emerged from the womb. It has been suggested that these rather emaciated human forms might represent baby demons, deities without faces; such demons are known to have been a focus of religious feeling. Perhaps the 'omega' symbol was sometimes associated with Ishtar (Inanna) as goddess of sex and prostitution, for on Neo-Assyrian seals it is shown within her shrine. On a cylinder seal of Middle Assyrian date from Samāš on the upper Euphrates (in present-day Turkey) a god receives worship while standing in his boat (see *boats of the gods*). Since the deity holds a

120 A dome emblem in a form resembling an omega. A common depiction among the symbols carved on Babylonian *kudurru* stones and seals.



one hand a crescent, he should be Sin (Annu-Ban). Local moon god. In the other hand he holds the 'omega' symbol.

121 The symbol is also found in Mesopotamia as a protective symbol.

**Pabshag**  
The deity Pabshag is attested from the Old Babylonian Period onwards. He was regarded as a local god and was the spouse of Ninurta. Pabshag was also associated with the city of Lagash, one of the cities where kingship flourished in antediluvian times, according to Sumerian tradition.

**Palm tree king**  
The Palm tree king is the name of one of the deities worshipped by the warrior god Ninurta (Ningirsu) at Main Hermet. Very little is known about him. Probably the Palm tree king was a deity of a minor local deity of the Lagash region whose cult was superseded by that of Ningirsu (leading to the invasion of his conquest). Ninurta was a deity whose cult was worshipped at Girsu in the Early Dynastic Period.

**Papsukkal**  
Papsukkal was a deity of the Lagash region whose cult was superseded by that of Ningirsu (leading to the invasion of his conquest). Ninurta was a deity whose cult was worshipped at Girsu in the Early Dynastic Period.

**Panther**  
There is a symbol in which it is impossible to identify with ancient Mesopotamia, to speak of a panther (the drives of a people collected there is because under the (geographical) ill-determined) heading Mesopotamia at

least 3,000 years of history are included, mentioning three main peoples (Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians) but also various other ethnic groups who either entered as conquerors (such as Kassites) or who lived peripherally to the central area (such as Amorites, Elamites, Hurrians). Each of these groups had their own gods. Inevitably during the enormous time span, developments occurred especially through syncretism. Second, there exists for Mesopotamia no statement, collected and authoritatively, of all myths or all deities such as can be recognised from time to time for Classical Greek or Roman mythology (e.g. Hesiod's *Theogony*, or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). Although the gods are often referred to generally, they certainly meant different things at different times.

On the other hand, because of the high degree of syncretism between the deities of different peoples, the pantheon can, in a sense, be viewed together with the cuneiform script and the language as a very conservative religious system of the few surviving elements of Mesopotamian culture.

Among the names of over 2,000 deities are preserved in the cuneiform records. The largest single presentation of these is the list of gods called (from its first line) 'An Annu a Babylonian scholarly work intended to give Akkadian names to the Sumerian deities, in its complete form it listed about 2,000 gods and goddesses, but the entire list has not yet been recovered.

**Papsukkal**: see *Ningirsu (god)*.

### Pazuzu

Pazuzu was an Assyrian and Babylonian demon god of the first millennium BC. He is represented with a rather canine face with abnormally bulging eyes, a scaly body, a snake-headed penis, the talons of a bird and usually wings. He is often regarded as an evil underworld demon, but he seems also to have played a beneficent rôle as a protector against pestilential winds (especially the west wind). His close association with Lammaštu led to his



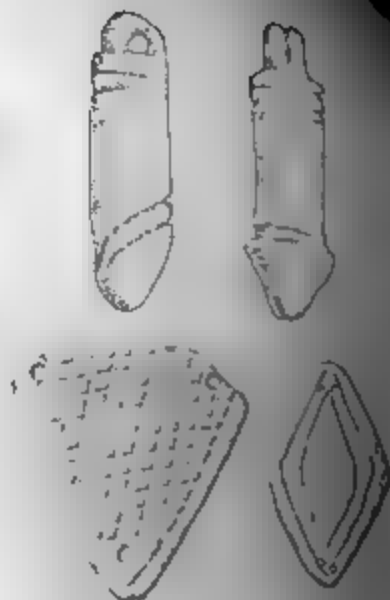






124 Some items of a 'sexual' nature from the Middle Assyrian temple at Isar at Assur. A lead figurine in the form of a wench of sexual intercourse, apparently taking place on an altar. Models of human sexual organs, with holes for attachment and suspension: phallus of stone, and a public triangle and vulva of baked clay.

human always rests upon a high structure, usually interpreted as an altar. These figurines may very likely represent ritual intercourse, although definitely not the earlier sacred Marriage, which involved a bed and not an altar. Instead they are probably in some way associated with the cult of Ishtar (Inanna) as goddess of physical love and prostitution, and were in fact found in her temple at Assur (see temples and temple architecture). From the same building come models of male and female human sexual organs, phallus of stone and clay, realistically pierced longitudinally down the middle (and possibly worn in the person or by wooden statues) and clay models of the female pubes and vulva.



All these objects doubtless had some amuletic property, and since sexual scenes involving only the copulating couple and no other persons are very rare, it may be that most of the representations are of some kind of cultic rather than private sex. Babylonian incantations to help overcome sexual impotence prescribe, as part of the accompanying procedure: 'You make a figurine, to be placed at the head of the bed during intercourse. Old Babylonian Period clay plaques with scenes of a sexual nature may have served such a function. See flour priests and priestesses.

#### purification

In order to perform the service of the gods with sacrifice and offering, to take part in religious rituals or to carry out effective rites involving magic (especially those directed against sorcery), it was necessary for the participants to be 'pure'.

Most purification rites involve the performance of actions which are metaphorically sweeping and water-sprinkling, clear the

shrine and settle the dust, (metaphorically) purifying the localities. The burning of incense and other aromatics cleanses the air and (metaphorically) purifies the atmosphere. Bathing and hand-washing by the participants clean the body and (metaphorically) purify the person.

On occasion animal sacrifices can have a purificatory effect as in the New Year ceremonies, on the fifth day of the ceremonies, a magician entered and cleaned the vacant shrine of the god Nabû within the Esagil complex. (The cult statue of Nabû had not yet arrived from Borsippa, the neighbouring town where Nabû normally resided.) The magician summoned a slaughterer to decapitate a sheep, with the corpse of which he would purify the shrine of Nabû. The word used literally wipe clean, is often used in a transferred sense. In due course the corpse was thrown into the river which passed by the temple, likewise the slaughterer disposed of the sheep's head. The details of this ritual are very similar to *nam-hurim* rituals, intended to avert the effect of future evils (see magic and sorcery). Clearly it concerns the shrine of Nabû, and not that of Marduk, usually thought of as central to the New Year ceremonies.

See bucket and cone, dyed tree and its rituals, priests and priestesses.

#### Qingu

In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, after the death of Anu (see above) at the hands of Enlil, Tiamat created as her champion and chief of her military forces the god Qingu (pronounced Kingu). Authority was conferred upon him when Tiamat presented to him the tablet of destinies. He is described as Tiamat's lover. When Qingu's army was confronted by Marduk, however, it soon lost heart and evaporated. Only Tiamat herself and her peard of monsters (Tiamat's creatures) stood their ground, but in the ensuing battle they too were defeated and killed. Qingu and the gods of his house were then taken prisoner and paraded in Marduk's triumphal procession. Marduk wrested the tablet of destinies from him and presented it to Anu (An).

After his victory, Marduk set about the task of reconstruction and reorganisation. With the exception of Qingu he pardoned the captured gods, pressing them into his team for the building of Babylon. Then, however, he conceived the idea of further delegating the labours to a new race, mankind. At the suggestion of his father Ea, in order to create mankind, he charged Qingu with high treason and sentenced him to death. After the execution, mankind was made from the god's blood.

See creation, dead gods.

*rabitu*: see demons and monsters

#### rainbow

The crown of the god Ninurta was described as a rainbow. Manzat, the Akkadian word for rainbow, was also the name of a goddess and of a star in the constellation Andromeda. The star may be illustrated on a *kudurrû* as a rainbow arching over a horse's head. (A star called the Horse was located near the star Rainbow.)

'Rainbow' was also a literary name of the city of Uruk.

ram-headed staff: see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods

#### rhomb

The 'rhomb' or 'lozenge' is a pointed oval within four enclosing perimeter lines. It is a very common motif in Mesopotamian art from early historic times until the Neo-Assyrian Period. Its significance is uncertain. The symbol has been variously explained as a grain of corn, a symbol of earth, an eye, or a woman's vulva. That it is closely associated in art with the goddess Ishtar (Inanna) and is similar to the clay models of vulvae found in her temple at Assur supports the last suggestion. The rhomb seems to have had a magical protective function.

#### right and left

The ancient Mesopotamians invariably spoke of 'right and left' in that order. The right hand was the hand of greeting or benediction, and of

purity used for eating. Presumably because of the right-handedness of the majority of people the right side (of the liver, of the moon, of constellations) was associated, generally speaking, with good fortune in divination while the left was associated with bad, but because of the complexity of the divination calculus and the necessity to take all ominous aspects of the entrails or other ominous material into account to produce a complete answer, this cannot be taken as an overall generalisation. In extispicy, for instance, it was not only the position of the organ, but the position of the ominous feature in the organ, that needed to be considered.

- 2 Divine and semi-divine protective figurines of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods can have the left leg uncovered and advanced. This may be related to their function in warding off and driving out the spirits of evil (see demons and muniters).

In terms of ovine protection, it was considered desirable to have benevolent deities standing at one's right side and at one's left.

### ring-post

- 125 The ring-headed post, usually with streamers, is common in early historic art, mainly from Uruk, often depicted as a doorpost for a structure built of reeds and probably made of a bundle of reeds bound together, with the upper ends bent over to make a loop for the cross-pole. As this shape is the earliest form of the written sign for the name of the goddess Inanna, it ought to be her symbol. After the Uruk Period, the symbol is to be found, though rarely, until the Early Dynastic Period, after which it disappears from art. Its disappearance may have been due to the obsolescence of pictographic writing.

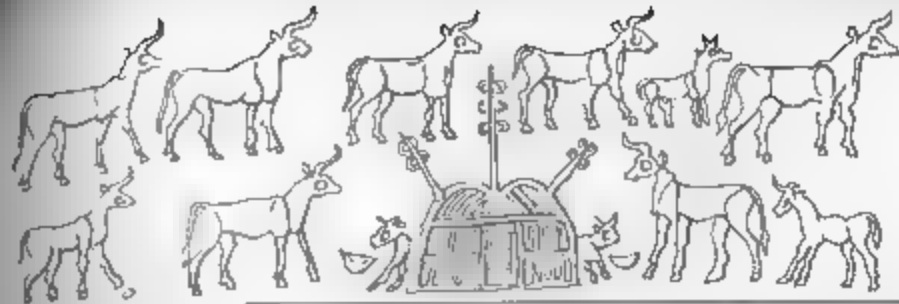
- A rather different ring-headed post without streamer is known as a symbol in Early Dynastic art. That it is often carried as a gatepost by gods with curls (see Lahmu) suggests a possible association with the god Enki.



125 (left) A baked clay model of a so-called ring-post, symbol of the goddess Inanna, from Uruk (model no. Warka). Uruk Period.



126 (right) A ring-staff. Detail from the carving on a stone bowl of the Uruk Period from Uruk.



127 Cattle gather around a shrine distinguished by its poles with rings. From a cylinder seal of the Late Uruk Period.

### ring-staff

- 128 This symbol is common in early historic art and, like the ring-post, was used as a sign in pictographic script, but its meaning is unknown. In the earliest representations it is often seen in an architectural context and in association with scenes of animal husbandry. It was most popular as a symbol and attribute of the Neo-Sumerian Period, and is last found in Old Babylonian art. When held as an object, in these later representations, it is always held by a god, never a goddess. Suggestions for the identity of this god are Adad (Iškur) and the sun god Samas (Utu). Advocates of the former sometimes regard the symbol as a stylisation of the lightning (symbol), while supporters of the identification of the god as Samas have seen the ring-staff as a version of the rod and ring, thought by some to be a symbol of Samas. Whatever may be the merits of this last argument, an identification of the god who holds the ring-staff as Samas may be the more plausible suggestion, for the symbol is also occasionally associated with the bull-man.

river god: see river ordeal.

### river of the underworld

According to some traditions about the underworld, it was reached, as in the later Greek tradition, by crossing a river. However, this was an atypical view rather than the usual

one (according to which the underworld was located beneath the earth, beneath the abzu: see cosmology). In the Neo-Assyrian poem 'A Vision of the Underworld', the ferryman was the demon Humuṣ-tabal (whose name means 'Hurry and Take Away'). With this may be compared the ferryman Sursumabu or Uruk-abu in the Epic of Gilgamesh, who ferries Gilgamesh across the waters of death. However, Uruk-abu is more properly the ferryman of Uruk-pitih (Ziusura), and when he visited Uruk-pitih Gilgamesh was not visiting the underworld.

Scenes in Neo-Babylonian art showing Lamasu being driven back to the underworld typically depict her riding her donkey, set within her boat which sails upon a river, presumably that of the underworld.

The precise location of the river of the underworld is not clear. Sometimes it is called by the name Huhur (Sumerian *id lu ruḡu*, which may mean 'The river which blocks a man's way').

### river ordeal

It was standard practice in Mesopotamia from the Old Babylonian Period on, when a legal dispute was not soluble by rational means (as, for example, because of conflicting sworn testimony by the parties involved), to refer the case to the River god: in other words to decide by means of a river ordeal. The judgement would then be declared in the name of Id (the 'Divine River'), or Sazi (son of the River god), or Ea (Enki). The person subjected to the ordeal was

required to plunge into the river (at a special location in the presence of the authorities) and possibly to swim a certain distance. If they came out safe, they were cleared. If they were overcome and sank, they were guilty and had to return to the court for sentencing (fine or execution), except in the unintended eventuality of their drowning. It seems likely that only one of the litigants, selected by lot, underwent the ordeal in which case it would be the lot, as much as the contestants' ability to swim, which determined the outcome. The river ordeal was regarded as a solemn expedient, and was in effect a form of divination.

The usual name for the river ordeal was *hurdu* (Sumerian *id lu ruḡa*). Sometimes the river of the ordeal was identified with a specific (deified) river, such as the Daban or Diyala (both lying north-east of Babylonia) or Habur (possibly identical with the Habur, an affluent of the upper Euphrates). All these rivers lie outside Babylonia and it is possible that the river of the ordeal in these cases is connected with the river of the underworld, perhaps thought to lie at a distant extremity of the known world. Otherwise the river simply called the (deified) River.

See witchcraft.

## rod and ring

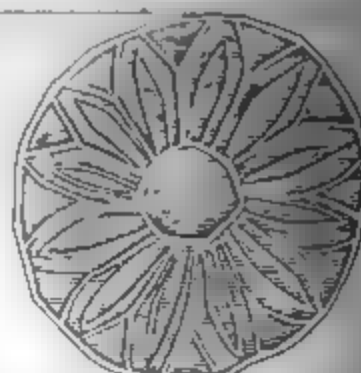
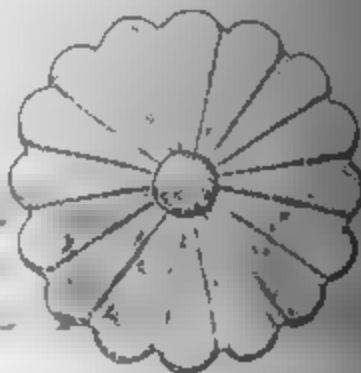
- 73 With the exception of doubtful Early Dynastic renderings, the divine attribute rod and ring (apparently so called also in Akkadian) occurs in art from the Sumerian Renaissance to the Neo-Assyrian Period. It is thought to depict a pair of measuring instruments, a rule and a tape taken as symbolic of wise justice. A particular association with the god Šamaš (Utu) has therefore been suspected. Sometimes, however, the rod and ring appear to be a staff and chaplet of beads. It is evident that they represent a general invocation of high-ranking divinity for they could be held by all the major gods and goddesses. On the Neo-Assyrian relief at Mari, male deities carry a 'rod and ring', female deities a ring without rod, perhaps a chaplet of beads.

See ring-staff.

## rosette

Rosettes appear on the short ends of an Uruk Period trough from Uruk, in association with animals and a horn adorned with posts of Inana (see ring-post).

On seals of Mitannian style, the symbol of seven dots is normally arranged in the form of a rosette. This is not connected, however, with the rosettes known from Middle Assyrian art, most commonly of faience and found together in large numbers. Since many were found in the temple of Ištar (Inana) at the city of Ašur, some scholars have connected the motif with Ištar and it is possible that in the Neo-Assyrian Period the rosette occasionally replaced the



128 Middle Assyrian Period rosettes from the temple of the goddess Ištar in the city of Ašur, (left) in faience and (right) in lead.

129 A baked-clay model of a bed, with lying couple, probably of Hurrian or Old Babylonian date. Such items have been thought to have some ritual relationship with the rites of the marriage of Dumuzi and Inana. Length 1.17 m.



war-cher combat. The evidence, however, is unclear. Single rosettes are often seen as a decoration on wrist straps worn by both human and supernatural figures in Neo-Assyrian monumental art.

## Sacred Marriage

Sacred Marriage is a term borrowed from the history of Greek religion (*hieros gamos*) to describe at least two different sorts of ritual in ancient Mesopotamia. The idea of marriage between deities is used in a number of Mesopotamian myths as one way of explaining creation. In a ritual of which records date north from the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods or later, a marriage between two deities was enacted in a symbolic

ceremony (called *huladum*) in which their cult statues were brought together. A ceremonial bed was required so that the statues could 'marry'. Such symbolic ceremonies are known for Marduk and Šarpanītu (forming a part of the New Year ceremonies), Nabû and Tašmētu (or Nanaya), Šamaš (Utu) and Aya (Serida), and Anu (An) and Antu. These 'marriages' do not appear to have been directly related to particular myths.

Quite different from this, and known from much earlier periods, is a ritual love-making apparently between a deified human king (see dedication of kings) and the goddess Inana, seen as a symbolic counterpart to the mythical union of the god Dumuzi with Inana. The exclusively literary evidence for this marriage

dates from the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur and the Isin Period, and it is still uncertain whether a real (temporary) 'marriage' between the king and a human priestess representing Inana actually took place, or if the whole ritual was purely symbolic. The beautiful songs and poems in Sumerian belonging to the Inana-Dumuzi cult suggest that the fertility of vegetation, animals and humans was believed in some way to depend upon the union of Inana and Ama-usumgal-ana (an aspect of Dumuzi); but as no exact description of a ritual survives (in the way that details are preserved of the New Year ceremonies), it is difficult to know whether some form of dramatic re-enactment took place or not. A 'marriage' between an *en* priestess (see priests and priestesses) and a local storm god, probably Adad or Wer (see Ikkur), is known from the Syrian town of Emar in the fourteenth century BC. Possibly here too a ruler impersonated the god.

It is not known what the immediate source of information was for the story recounted by Herodotus (who may have visited Babylon in the fifth century BC) according to which a woman spent the night in a shrine on top of the ziggurat of Babylon, waiting to be visited by Heli (Marduk) himself, although it is clearly reminiscent of what is known from earlier periods in Mesopotamia.

See prostitution and ritual sex.

sacred tree: see stylised tree and its 'rituals'

#### sacrifice and offering

The widespread Mesopotamian idea of man having been created to act as the servant of the gods meant that it was considered necessary to feed and clothe the gods constantly and to make them presents. Among these various sorts of offering, the term sacrifice refers especially to the killing of an animal. Exactly the same foods and drinks were offered to the gods as were consumed by humans, with perhaps more emphasis on the luxury items: frequent fresh meat, fish, cream, honey, cakes and the best sorts of beer. Incense and aromatic woods were burned before them, as they might be at a

human banquet. These sacrifices and offerings took two forms: the 'regular' offerings, offered at fixed times daily throughout the year (just as daily services are performed in a Christian church); and the special, occasional offerings made at festivals which might be monthly or annual occurrences. Clothing was also offered. The actual comestibles and garments were redistributed to the temple staff (according to strict hierarchical regulations, from high priests down to courtyard sweepers) after being presented to the gods. In addition to the organised offerings, individuals might make personal offerings as they chose.

Offerings made as presents fall into three categories. First, those which were 'useful' to the gods – beds, chairs, boats, cups and vessels, weapons dedicated from war booty, and jewellery – were all absorbed into the temple treasury as part of the 'property' of the god. Second, statues of the offerers might be placed before the god to represent them in constant prayer before the deity. These and other *thank* offerings often carry inscriptions stating that they were offered for the life of the offerer, or on behalf of some other person. Finally, offerings might be made as a form of request. A idea of human limbs, of beds, of pregnant women and figurines of animals may have been of this type.

It was not only on altars and offering tables within temples that animal sacrifice was offered, for in the earliest periods certain places outside the temple proper were specifically demarcated for this purpose. In one of the series of prehistoric (Uruk Period) temples at Eridu and in a room close by the entrance of another, archaeologists found heaps of ash containing great quantities of fish bones. They were apparently not part of a store of food or leftovers from the kitchens, but the remains of continual and repeated sacrifice. In a later (Uruk Period) building an enclosure was filled up with ash and fish bones. Unlike the earlier temple rooms, this enclosure was three-sided, with an open front, and represented a delineated area away from the temple itself. Fish offerings of the prehistoric and early historic

periods are also known from Girsu (Tello) and Uruk, where large quantities of fish bones, including complete skeletons and skulls, were found crammed into enclosures.

This type of large-scale fish offering is unknown from the Third Early Dynastic Period and later. Instead, from these early historic periods, enclosed deposits are found which contained mixed offerings of various animals, including fish, birds and other small animals, as well as goats and cattle. Some of these deposits also contained grain and vegetable matter. They are of two main kinds: a room containing shallow rectangular trenches, each with a slanting floor (confined to the Early Dynastic Period), and circular brick structures (found commonly up to and including the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur, with a last known occurrence in the Old Babylonian Period).

In the first of these arrangements, the areas of sacrifice were laid out almost identically to the earlier fish offering places, with a narrow (or some four metres long by two thirds of a metre wide) dug at an angle into the floor of the enclosure. The inside walls of the trench were plastered with clay and repaired after each migration. Occasionally the sides of the trench were lined with bricks. Reeds or reed mats were laid on the floor. The trench was cut straight at the entrance, but was rounded at the deeper end, where the fire was kindled. After everything was burnt, the trench was swept clean and prepared for the next incineration. At Uruk the entrance to the trench was always oriented to the north-east. In some instances large pottery vessels were placed alongside the trenches; they also contained the bones of fish, birds and other small animals. Sometimes the enclosures became so congested with sacrificial debris that the surrounding walls had to be increased in height. Some of the sacrificial trenches at Uruk (among the earliest) are located in the precinct of E-ana, the temple of Inana. At a slightly later date they were filled in with regularly laid brickwork and were no longer used.

The rounded structures seem to have served

more or less the same function. They were sited either within enclosures or (apparently) on open-air plots.

We know nothing about the background to this method of sacrifice, only that they were constantly repeated in the same places, often close by the temple, but never within the sanctuaries themselves.

See afterlife; dedication; food and drink of the gods; human sacrifice; libation.

#### Salmu

The Akkadian word *salmu* (Sumerian *nu* or *alam*) is used to refer to any piece of representative art – figurative or not. 'Image', 'representation' or 'representative' (in the sense of an object standing for a person or creature without necessarily being a portrayal of them) are all possible translations. The word is used to refer to statues, steles and figurines. It can also mean 'constellation'.

From at least the Middle Assyrian Period, *Salmu* sometimes is used as the proper name of a deity, a sun god who can be identified with Shamash and in the Middle Babylonian text, is regarded as the father of the god Dunene (see *du*). In Neo-Assyrian sources, the name occasionally occurs in the plural, as if denoting a group of deities. The form *Salmu-Sarri* ('*Salmu* of the king') is probably a modified name of the same god(s) (singular or plural).

It has been suggested that *Salmu* is a name for the winged disc.

#### Samana

Incantations from the Old Babylonian Period are intended to protect infants, young men and women and prostitutes from attack by the demon Samana, who is described as having a lion's mouth, dragon's teeth, eagle's claws and the tail of a scorpion. The name seems also to be associated with a grain disease, possibly spread by a noxious insect.

It is not certain if this demon is originally the same as the minor deity whose worship is attested at Lagash and one or two other Sumerian towns during the Early Dynastic Period. The writing of his name is irregular, but appears to

have been pronounced Saman. He was also (under the name Saman-ana) included among the Slain Heroes enumerated in the poem *Lugale*.

### Sarpānitu

Sarpānitu was the name of the goddess who was regarded as the wife of Marduk, and who was consequently the principal goddess of the city of Babylon. She was worshipped under the name Erua as a goddess of childbirth, from Akkadian *erū*, 'to be pregnant'. Her name Sarpānitu probably means 'she of Šarpān' (the name of an (as yet) unlocated town or village, perhaps near to Babylon), not, as was formerly thought, 'she who shines like refined silver (*šarpū*)'.

See Dilmunite gods; Sacred Marriage.

Sataran: see Išaran.

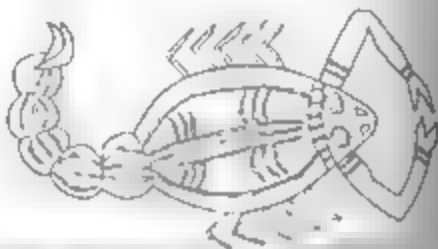
saw: see Utu

scimitar, see *Nergal*, standards, staves and sceptres of the gods.

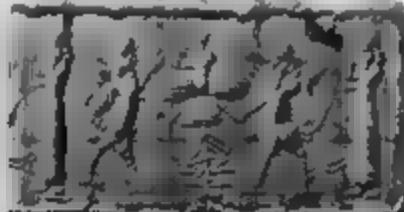
### scorpion

Representations of scorpions are known from prehistoric times onwards, but not unequivocally as a religious symbol until late in the Kassite Period on kudurrus, on which the creature is labelled as a symbol of the goddess Išhara. 7, 10 12

Although not fatal, the sting of the scorpion found in Mesopotamia is sufficiently painful to



130 (above) A scorpion, symbol of the goddess Išhara. One of the symbols carved on a kuduru of the Kassite Period.



131 (left) Neo-Assyrian cylinder seals, with rolled impressions, depicting different kinds of scorpion-men. Hts. 29 mm.

suggest the creature as a suitable image of power and protection. Magical spells were used to counteract the effect of the sting. On representations of scorpions and scorpion-people, the tail is always emphasised, rising up threateningly along the back or over the head.

The Scorpion was also the Babylonian name of the constellation Scorpius (see zodiac).

### scorpion-people

*Girtablullū*, 'scorpion-man', is the Akkadian term for a supernatural being with a horned cap of divinity, human head with beard, human body, the hindquarters and talons of a bird, a snake-headed penis, and a scorpion's tail. He may or may not have wings. The creature is first seen in the art of the Third Dynasty of Ur and in the Akkadian Period, but was common only in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian times. The type survived in art until the Hellenistic Period. As attendants of Šamaš (Utu) (in art often supporting the solar winged disc or with their heads possibly shown above its wing tip), the scorpion-men were also, in the Neo-Assyrian Period, powerful protectors against demons. Wooden figurines of them are prescribed, along with figurines of other protective demons and monsters, in Neo-Assyrian instructions for rituals of protective magic, and an actual example has been found in a steatohum at the seventh-century BC Urartian city of Tešebaini (modern Hamir Han). These rituals mention figurines of 'male

and female' scorpion-people, showing that the 'scorpion-woman' was a figure in art, although no representation of her has yet been identified: pairs of scorpion-tailed figures are common but seem usually to represent two bearded males (compare merman and mermaid).

In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, the scorpion-man is counted as one of Tiamat's creatures, while in the Epic of Gilgamesh, a terrifying scorpion-man and scorpion-woman guard the gate of Mount Mašū, where the sun rises.

An iconographically rather different human and scorpion combination with human head, 90, 131 the full body and legs of a bird, and a scorpion's tail is seen in Kassite, Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Seleucid Period art. It is unclear whether this is also a *girtablullū*.

### seals of the gods

Like humans, the gods had their own seals for marking their property or for giving their agreement in legal documents. In practice they were used to signify the property or the agreement of the *šamāš* (Utu). Among the most famous are the cylinder seals of the god Aššur 132 found on the tablets of the so-called 'vassal treaties' of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (reigned 680–669 BC), which were intended to ensure the royal succession.

*Šabitu*: see Seven (demons); Seven (gods).

132 A worshipper kneels before the god Aššur (behind stands the weather god Adad.) The design of a Middle Assyrian seal of the god Aššur from its impression on one of the clay tablets of the 'vassal treaties' of King Esarhaddon. Found at Kalhu (modern Nimrud). The background was covered with a long text, now very faint and largely illegible.



serpents: see dragons; snakes.

seven: see numbers.

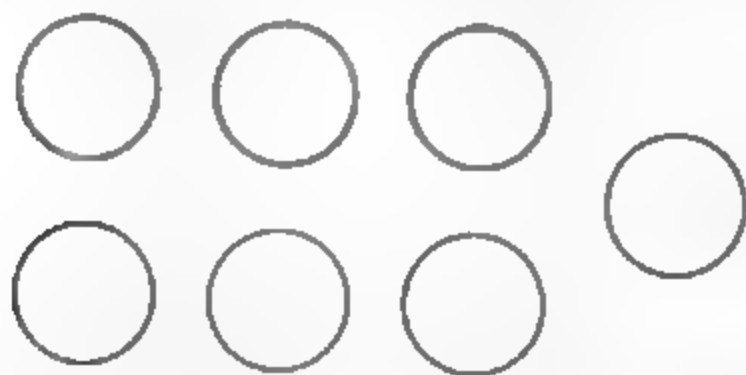
### Seven (demons)

The Akkadian word *sebittu* is a singular noun meaning a 'group of seven'; Sumerian *iminbi* corresponds to it. 'The Seven' is a name given to a group of demons, the offspring of An and Ki, who act as assistants to the god Nergal (Erra). One collection of magical incantations seems to identify the Seven with seven named evil udugs, sometimes also called 'Seven and seven' or 'Seven times seven'.

See Seven (gods).

### seven dots

With possible antecedents dating back to pre-historic times, the symbol of the seven dots (or globes) is first known in unequivocal form in Mitannian glyptic art, and became common in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Periods. On Mitannian seals the dots are usually arranged as six dots around a central dot, forming a kind of rosette. Thereafter, however, the dots are normally shown simply in two rows of three, with the seventh dot placed between the rows at the far end. From early on (at least from Middle Assyrian times), the seven dots appears as a symbol in close association with other clearly astral symbols such as the solar disc and the crescent. In Assyrian, Babylonian and later art, they were regarded as a representation of the Pleiades: a new, though less popular, version of the symbol showed seven stars rather than dots. Inscriptions also



133 Seven dots, symbol of the Seven (gods), as commonly depicted in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art.

identify the symbol as that of the *Sebittu* or Seven (gods), with whom the Pleiades were evidently associated.

See zodiac.

### Seven (gods)

As well as for a group of demons (see Seven (demons)), *Sebittu* (Sumerian *Iminbi*), 'the Seven', is a name given to a group of beneficent gods whose power can be harnessed against evil demons by means of magical incantations. 'The Seven' operate together with their sister *Narūdu*, probably in origin the Elamite goddess *Narunte* (see Elamite gods), and so may themselves be of Elamite origin. They should be distinguished from the Babylonian Seven Sages (*apkallu*). They may be identical with the seven children of *Išhara*. They are sometimes named (as 'Seven and seven') together with another group, who may be the seven sons of *Enmešarra*. There were temples to these Seven at the Assyrian capital cities of Kalhu (Nimrud), Dūr-Šarkēn (Khorsabad) and Nineveh. Astrologically they were identified with the star-group Pleiades.

The standard iconography of the Seven in the Neo-Assyrian Period is known. They wear tall cylindrical hats with feathered upper borders, and long open robes. Each carries an axe and a knife, as well as a bow and quiver. These are the attributes prescribed for the Seven in rituals concerning the placement of protective figurines at set locations about a house. In practice, when in forms other than plastic art, this iconography could, it seems, pose problems, for on a stone relief slab from the palace of Assurbanipal (reigned 668–c. 627 BC) at Nineveh, the long bows have been carved first then erased in favour of the axes and knives.

At least in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art, the Seven were symbolised by the seven dots, sometimes substituted by seven stars (probably an allusion to the identification with the Pleiades).

See zodiac.

seven-headed snake: see snakes.





134 Three of the divine Seven, carrying axes and knives, and with their original bows erased. Monumental stone relief from the royal palace of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (reigned 668–c.627 BC) at Nineveh. Ht. 0.89 m.

### Seven Sages

According to Babylonian tradition, seven *apkallū* ('wise men' or 'sages') lived before the Flood. Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian ritual texts give their names and the seven cities from which they were believed to have come, although there are variant traditions which cannot be fully reconciled one with another.

Other antediluvian figures are also said to have been *apkallū*, notably Adapa of Eridu.

The Seven Sages should be distinguished from the Seven (gods) (*Sebitti*) because Neo-Assyrian instructions for rituals including protective figurines prescribe sets of figures of the Seven followed by those of the Seven Sages. Figures of different forms of the Seven Sages are to be made, some apparently in human form, some wearing fishes' skins (see fish-garbed figure), and winged figures with birds' faces (see griffin-demon).

The tradition of the Seven Sages seems to be preserved in Berossos' account of eight crea-

tures who appeared from the sea in the 'first days', beginning with Oannes and ending with Udalgon. In the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, the Seven Sages are credited with building the walls of Uruk.

See dead gods.

sex: see creation; Inana; prostitution and ritual sex; Sacred Marriage.

Sihutu (Sihutu): see Seven (demons); Seven (gods).

### Siduri

The goddess Siduri (Siduri in the Hurrian version) is the proprietress of the ale-house at the world's edge in the Epic of Gilgamesh. On his journey to Ut-naphist (Ziusura), Gilgamesh meets Siduri, who tries to persuade the hero to abandon his quest for immortality and to enjoy what fruits the present life has to offer.

Gilgamesh, where are you going?  
You will not find the life for which you are searching.

When the gods created man,  
They allotted death for mankind,  
Keeping life for themselves.  
Gilgamesh, let your belly be full,  
Make merry by day and by night,  
Make a feast of rejoicing every day.  
By day and by night, dance and play.  
Let your clothing be clean and fresh,  
Your head be washed, your body bathed in water.

Look to the child who clutches your hand,  
Let your wife enjoy herself in your lap.  
This is the fulfilment of man.

### sin

The various words in Sumerian and Akkadian which are translated as 'sin' (offences against moral or divine law) are equally used to refer to crime' (infringement of civil or criminal law) or to social ills, such as the prevalence of crime in a country. Assyrian kings were fond of talking about 'punishing' the 'crimes' of their enemies (crimes which consisted in resisting the Assyrian Empire or failing to adhere to a

treaty imposed upon them), but this is largely propaganda. Nonetheless, a distinction was recognised between offences that had to be dealt with by the courts and offences of a more social nature. Such 'sins' might be deliberate, but one whole magical rite is devoted to relieving the patient of the numerous sins which might be committed by negligence unwittingly. The patient might not even know which god or goddess he or she had offended. Such sin could be 'undone', 'expelled' or 'annulled' by a god, and it is stressed that 'prayer can undo sin'. The use of the word 'patient' in this context emphasises the Babylonian view of sin as comparable with disease. Sin could be transmitted by relatives or inherited from parents; it could be 'caught' by, for example, sitting on the same chair as had been sat on by a tabooed person. Like disease, it too could be cured by magic rituals involving potions and herbal ointments accompanied by incantations. In this we can recognise an 'sin' as a conscious feeling of sin and guilt, a conscience, which can be eased by magical practices or by prayer. Looking at it another way, we can say that manifestations of psychological disturbance were interpreted as evidence of 'sin' and may well have been cured by rituals in which the patient had faith. The Babylonians did not have a doctrine of original sin, but they believed that we are all very prone to sin.

See good and evil; magic and sorcery; taboos.

Sin: see Nanna-Suen.

### Slain Heroes

The Slain Heroes were a bizarre group of dead monsters considered to have been slain by the warrior god Ninkisi (for another version by Ninurta). These include the Six-headed Wild Ram, the Seven-headed Snake (see snakes), the Dragon, the Palm-tree King, the Gypsum, the Strong Copper, the Kuli-ana, the Magillan-boat, Lord Saman-ana, the Bison-bull and the Lendugud Bird. The myth concerning the 'killing' of these monsters - some animals, some apparently inanimate - can be



135 The god Ningirsu or Ninurta slays the seven-headed snake monster *mumukhu*. Detail from an engraved shell plaque of the Early Dynastic Period.

traced back to the period of Gudea, ruler of the Sumerian city-state of Lagash, who rebuilt the temple of Ningirsu at Girsu and did a lot to promote the cult of that god. Gudea arranged for the 'Slain Heroes' to receive offerings in the new temple of Ningirsu.

In fact there is evidence that at least the 'sin-tree, the Wild Ram, the Copper and Saman were being worshipped as minor deities up to two hundred years earlier, and there is reason to believe that the myth of their 'slaying' by Ningirsu was an attempt to absorb them into his mythology.

Later, other trophies were added to the list, and the myth was transferred to other deities such as Zababa, Lugalbanda, Erra (Nergal), Marduk or even Nabu. Some of the once-terrifying monsters were ultimately transformed into minor demons and benign beings whose presence could be harnessed to ward off hostile demons. In the Neo-Assyrian Period, small clay figurines of beings some of whom can be traced back to the Slain Heroes of Ningirsu were buried in the foundations of buildings to protect their inhabitants from demonic disturbance. Traditions such as that of the Slain Heroes may ultimately have contributed to Greek myths of Near Eastern origin, such as that of the Labours of Hercules.

See bull; bison; bull-man; dead gods, demons and monsters; dragons; merman and mermaid; Samana; Tiamat's creatures.

### Smiting god

Since the so-called 'smiting' posture is the inevitable position for wielding certain weapons, 'warring gods' appear in the art of all periods. The term is applied in particular, however, to a figure in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art who wears the horned cap of divinity and often a short kilt; he may be naked above the waist. He holds one fist in the air and the other hand towards the ground. He is often paired



136 A figurine of a god with raised fist, smiting the air, possibly the god Lugal, made of sun-baked clay, painted blue. It was found completely encased in bitumen, placed in the corner of a room of the royal palace of the Babylonian king Nabopolassar (reigned 625-605 BC.) in the city of Babylon. (H. 2.70 mm.)



with the lion-demon. He has not yet been certainly identified with any named god, although he may represent the god Lugal (see *La-tarū* and *Lugal*).

### snake-dragon

The snake-dragon (with horns, snake's body and neck, lion's forelegs and bird's hindlegs) is represented from the Akkadian Period down to the Hellenistic Period as a symbol of various gods or as a generally magically protective hybrid not associated specifically with any deity. By comparing the figure depicted on the gates and processional way at Babylon with the description of the building operations given by King Nebuchadnezzar II (reigned 604–562 BC), it has been possible to identify with certainty the creature's Akkadian name as *muš-huššu*, 'furious snake'. The complex mythologies and divine associations surrounding the creature have only recently been collected and explained. The *muš-huššu* was originally an attendant of Ninazu, the city god of E. Anuna. It was 'inherited' by the god Tishpak when he replaced Ninazu as city god in the Akkadian or early Old Babylonian Period, and in Lagash became associated with Ninazu's son Ningirsu. Possibly after Hammurabi's conquest of E. Anuna, the creature was transferred to the new Babylonian national god, Marduk, and later to Nabû. The conquest of Babylon by the

Assyrian king Sennacherib (reigned 704–681 BC) brought the motif to Assyria, normally as the beast of the state god Aššur. On Sennacherib's rock-reliefs at Malai, however, the creature accompanies three different gods, Aššur, Ellil (Eliš) and another god, most likely Nabû.

### snake gods

The snake gods of ancient Mesopotamia, especially Nisrā, seem to be the only fully animalian, non-anthropomorphic, deities (although *La-tarū* may have had a leonine face and worn a lion's skin). The snake god Nisrā was worshipped at the city of Dēr, located on the northern border between Mesopotamia and Elam, as the minister of Ištaru.



137 (above) Snake gods. Detail from a cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period.

138 (left) The snake-dragon (*muš-huššu*) as depicted repeatedly on moulded bricks of the Ittar Gate and of the Processional Way at Babylon, built for King Nebuchadnezzar II (reigned 604–562 BC).



the city god of Dēr (see local gods). His cult there is attested from the earliest times and was long-lived. He was also worshipped until Middle Babylonian times in the E-kur, the temple of Ellil (Eliš) in Nippur, where he was regarded as a protective deity of the temple and a protective presence. The cult of Ištaru, a deity of the city of Ur and probably in origin a god representing the river Euphrates, remained independent until the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur, but was later syncretised with the cult of Nisrā. It is possible that the snake symbol found on kudurrus represents the god Nisrā (see snakes).

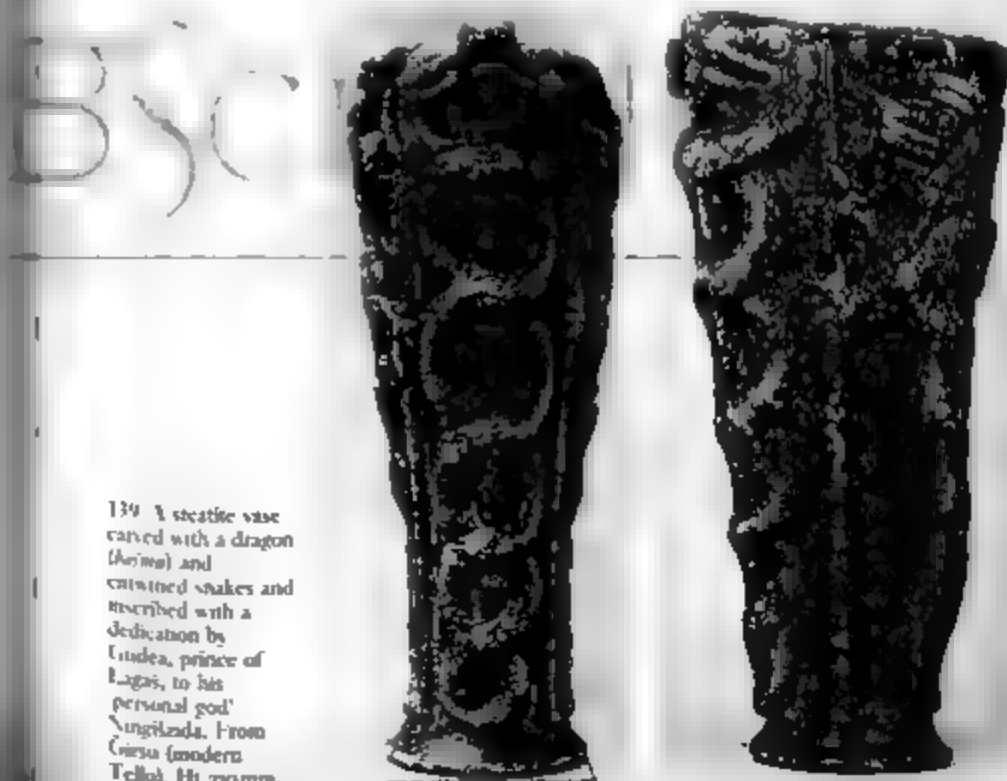
An anthropomorphic god with the lower body of a snake, shown on cylinder seals of the Old Akkadian Period, may also represent Nisrā.

For the seven-headed snake, see snakes.

On the cylinder seal of Gudea, prince of Lagash, the ruler is introduced into the presence of a superior deity by a god from each of whose shoulders a horned snake rises. This is probably intended to represent Ningirsu, regarded by Gudea as his personal protective deity (see personal gods).

### snakes

Representations of snakes are naturally frequent in iconography from the prehistoric periods onwards, but it is not always easy to decide whether or not they carried any religious value. When depicted as attributes of deities they are seen associated with both gods and goddesses. As an independent symbol the snake appears on kudurrus and is identified



139 A stela vase carved with a dragon (*horima*) and entwined snakes and inscribed with a dedication by Gudea, prince of Lagash, to his personal god Ningirsu. From Uruk (modern Uruk). Ht. 230 mm.

by the inscription on one as symbolising the minister of the god Ištar (and so is possibly Nihah: see snake gods). Snakes continued to be portrayed in religious and secular art in later periods. As a divine symbol in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian art, the snake can be identified from ritual texts directly as the god Nihah.

The motif of the two serpents entwined together as if they were a length of rope was a very common one in early historic, Sumerian and Neo-Sumerian art and thereafter occurs sporadically on seals and amulets down to the thirteenth century BC. One of the finest examples is carved on a steatite vase dedicated by Gudea of Lagash to his patron god Ningirsu.

The horned viper (*Crotalus cerastes*), a mildly venomous snake native to the Middle East, has a pair of spike-like folds of skin on its head. In art, the form of a snake with a pair of horns rising from the forehead occurs as a symbol on Kassite kudurrus and in Neo-Assyrian art as an element of seal designs and in the form of magically protective figurines. It has been identified as the creature called in Akkadian *bulnu* (Sumerian *bul-nu-tur*). The mythological traditions are obscure, but by Assyrian times the figure was often a magically protective type. A variant horned snake with forelegs was apparently regarded as a different creature, although carrying in Akkadian the same name *bulnu* (Sumerian *bulnu*). This being was also known as *ulungu* (Sumerian *ulungu*). Originally one of the trophies of Ninurta (see Slain Heroes), it was later – when the snake-dragon became Marduk's animal – the symbol of various gods formerly associated with the snake-dragon, including Ningirsu.

A seven-headed *mutmahh* monster is referred to in mythological texts and depicted in Early Dynastic art as a kind of dragon with seven long snake necks and heads. This creature may be the seven-headed hydra killed by the god Ningirsu or Ninurta (see Slain Heroes), also referred to in spells.

See mongoose; 'plant of life'

140 The solar disc of the sun god Samas.

solar disc

The disc with four-pointed star and three radiating wavy lines between each of the points occurs from the Akkadian down to the Neo-Babylonian Period. It almost invariably stands as a symbol of the sun god Samas (Utu). The Akkadian names of the symbol were *samsu* and *suplu*. It was often represented upon a pole as a standard.

sovereignty: see magic and sorcery; witchcraft.

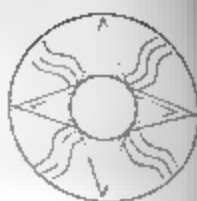
spade (symbol)

The shaft with triangular head, as an independent symbol, sometimes on a base, and as an attribute held by a figure, is known from the Neo-Sumerian down to the Neo-Babylonian Period. It is inscriptionally attested in Kassite, Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian monuments as the spade or hoe (*marra*) of the god Marduk, perhaps originally an agricultural deity who had become the national god of Babylonia. In the Assyrian Period the original agricultural purpose of the object was known, but perhaps considered to be of diminished relevance. In some Assyrian representations, especially on the palace reliefs when held by figures of Lahmu, it seems to have been transformed into a spear, to which the original form approximated. It is still referred to, however, as a *marra*, 'spade'.

In later Babylonian times, some slaves were branded with the device of a spade (see dedication).

sphinx: see bulls and lions with human head.

141 The *marra* 'spade', a symbol of the Babylonian god Marduk.



standards, staves and sceptres of the gods. A number of different standards, staves and sceptres occur as divine symbols. A ram-headed staff is known from the Old Babylonian down to the Achaemenid Period, and is identified by inscriptional evidence from Kassite and Assyrian sculpture as a symbol of the god Ea (Enki). It usually rests upon a base, but occasionally stands alone or upon the back of a goat-fish. Sometimes, on Neo-Assyrian seals, Ea carries a crook, perhaps an abbreviated form of the ram-head staff.

An eagle-headed (or griffin-headed) staff is represented only on Kassite kudurrus, to be identified from the inscription on one as a symbol of the god Zababa. It was later adopted as one of the Assyrian military standards.

A staff or scimitar with the head of a lion (or rather lion-demon, with donkey ears) is found as a motif from the Akkadian down to the Neo-Babylonian Period. From the inscriptions on a kudurru and a Neo-Babylonian stela, it is shown to be a symbol of the underworld god Nergal.

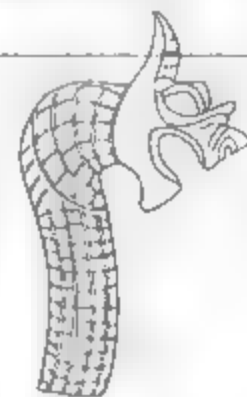
The double lion-headed sceptre or staff is a common attribute and symbol in Neo-Sumerian art, and is there associated with a variety of deities, male and female. It was apparently a symbol of a particular deity in Kassite and Neo-Assyrian monuments. Exactly which god it there represents depends upon the monument. In the inscriptions of two of the Babylon rock stelae of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (reigned 704–681 BC): Nergal, Ninurta and Nusku have each been suggested. Nergal is the most likely on epigraphic grounds. He has been discounted because his symbol on kudurrus is well established as the single lion-headed staff or scimitar, but perhaps the double lion-headed sceptre was regarded merely as a variant of this (and the lion-heads often have upright ears). In any event, the other two gods also each have another identified symbol on the kudurrus (the perched bird of Ninurta and the lamp of Nusku) and Ea is known to have two separate symbols, the goat-fish with ram-head staff and the turtle.

Neo-Assyrian military standards are occasionally shown in campaign scenes on Assyrian sculptured reliefs, especially those of Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883–859 BC). They represent various deities and it has been suggested that the army was divided into units supported by the different temples. The troops of Ištar (Inana) carried a banner showing the goddess herself, armed and set within a nimbus of stars. Another standard depicting a god drawing a bow and standing between streams of water and a pair of outward-facing bulls may have signified the legions of the temple of Adad (Iškur) – mountain streams were believed to be the responsibility of the storm god, probably because he was the god of the rains and because the reverberant sound of the waters running over the rocks was reminiscent of thunder. A military standard of the reign of Sargon II (reigned 722–705 BC) depicts an unusual god with the head of a falcon; his identity is unknown.

See birds; bird-gods; Ninuhur (god); ring-post; ring-staff; solar disc

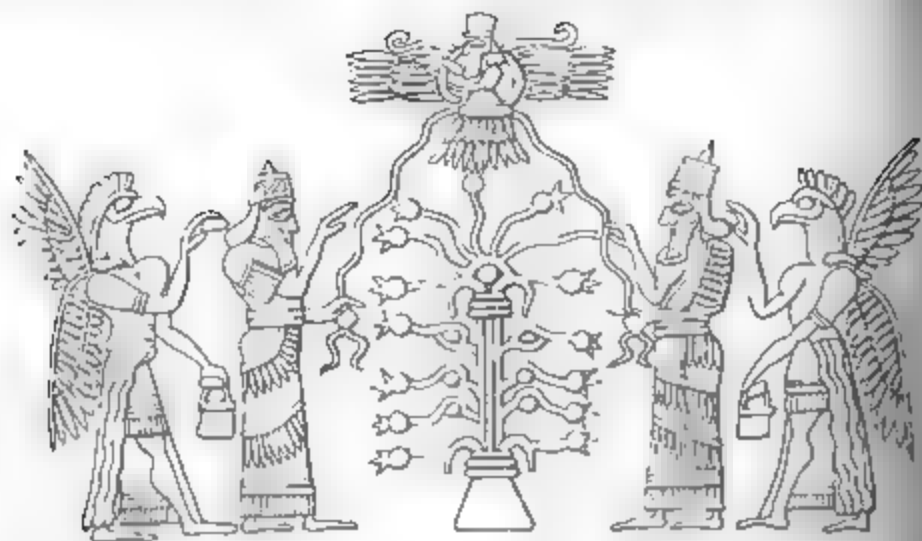
star (symbol)

The eight-pointed star is known from prehistoric times, through to the Neo-Babylonian



142 (above) A standard with the head of a lion-demon (lion with upright ears), an emblem of the underworld god Nergal. One of the symbols carried on a kudurru of the Kassite Period.

143 (below) The star-disc, a symbol of the goddess Ištar.



144 The Assyrian king, shown twice, stands on either side of a stylised tree and image of the sun god Samas in his winged disc. Winged protective griffin-demons with purificatory buckets and cones flank the scene. Fragment cylindrical of the early Neo-Assyrian Period.

statues. see cult statues.

storm gods and storm demons. see Iškur; lion-demon; Namahda; ūmu debrutu.

stylised tree and its 'ritual'

The motif referred to by modern commentators as the 'stylised or sacred' tree or, more presumptuously, as the 'tree of life', has provoked more discussion and controversy than almost any other element in Mesopotamian art. The literature is almost as extensive as the representations of the motif itself, and includes a number of books devoted entirely to the subject. As with the equally ubiquitous and often iconographically associated winged disc, opinions vary greatly as to the meaning and significance of the symbol, and lack of explicit textual reference to the tree or its function allows speculation a free rein.

Stylised trees of one type or another are commonly portrayed in Mesopotamian art from prehistoric times through to the Neo-Babylonian Period. At one time the tree will be very formalised, often elaborate, as another tending towards naturalism, but in either case it will usually be set upon an elevation of some

kind or placed in a position of prominence with respect to the other elements of a design. The tree is often flanked by animals, or by supernatural figures.

In scenes mostly restricted to the second and first millennia BC, and particularly popular in Assyria, a stylised tree, usually with winged disc above, is flanked by semi-human genies, one or more possibly holding a bucket and cone. The various interpretations of this so-called 'cone-smearing' ritual include a magically protective rite, a benediction, an anointing of a symbol of the king, or of the king himself (the cones sometimes also being held behind the king's head), a literal rendering of fruit-picking or of fertilisation of the date palm, a myth of the god Dumuzi, a symbolic reference to fire and water as the elements of life, or a piece of astronomical symbolism. There may be more than a single aspect involved. For example, the nature of the genies, almost invariably 'supernatural' rather than human, suggests some apotropaic element, while a relationship to, or even derivation from, actual date palm fertilisation (but only in the Mesopotamian south, not in Assyria) is plausible. Nevertheless, it is highly likely that the principal purpose of the rite was as a ritual of purification (see bucket and cone).

Interest in the stylised tree has been provoked, and interpretations of it often influenced, by the 'tree of life' (and the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil') in the Garden of Eden, in Genesis 2-3. There is no reason, however, to connect the two traditions.

See Palm-tree hang.

stylus: see wedge.

Sud: see Niriil; Nisaba.

Sumuqam: see Šakkan.

sun disc: see solar disc.

sun god: see Uta.



145 Painted decoration on the inside of a prehistoric pottery bowl found at Samarra. The design shows birds and fish revolving around a central swastika.

swastika

The swastika or fylfot is encountered only very rarely in Mesopotamian art, but the rôle of this symbol of modern notoriety is not without interest. It is unequivocally represented on prehistoric painted pottery and early historic seals. 145 Impressions, but is thereafter seen again only in a single instance, on a limestone slab fronting a Neo-Assyrian temple building at Aldur, painted in blue. It fills the gap between these widely separated occurrences, some scholars (especially those writing just before and during the Second World War, when interest in the motif was at a peak) have attempted to see the outline of the symbol in various arrangements of men, crossed animals and geometric motifs throughout the periods of ancient Mesopotamian art, but these interpretations can stretch the imagination.

The device has been variously explained as a solar symbol derived from the wheels of the chariot of the sun god, as the sign for a fortress or fortified site or as symbolic of a whirlwind or of the four winds. There is no convincing evidence for the motif as a solar device, at least in Mesopotamia (but see cross).

Period. In early representations it may have had a general astral significance, but at least from the Old Babylonian Period (and in all probability from the Early Dynastic) it was normally, though not always, a symbol of Inanna. Ištar, goddess of love and war, the planet Venus. Most commonly from the Old Babylonian Period onwards, the star is enclosed within a disc. On Middle and Neo-Assyrian seals, the upper body of a goddess, presumably Ištar, is sometimes set above a crescent surrounded by stars, a variation on the more usual armed goddess within a nimbus of stars.

The motif of a six-pointed star occurs throughout the same period, but is of unknown significance.

In later Babylonian times some persons dedicated as temple slaves were branded with the device of a star (see dedication).

See seven dots; solar disc.

146 Wild animals were under the protection of the god Sakkan. Copy of a life-size wall painting of a seated cheetah from the main altar in the Late Uruk Period Temple at Tell 'Uqir. Ht. 20.93m.



## Sakkan

146 In the flat, open countryside of Mesopotamia a wide range of animals lived in ancient times. Among these were the lion, cheetah, wolf, jackal, hyena, wild cattle, oryx, gazelle, wild pig, wild cat and lynx as well as the beaver and mongoose. In the more mountainous areas the fallow and roe deer, wild goat, ibex, wild sheep and, more rarely, the leopard and bear could be seen. The god who protected all these was Sakkan (in Akkadian, Sumuqan). In one of the Sumerian poems called 'The Death of Gilgamesh', offerings are made to Sakkan in the underworld. In the seventh tablet of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, Enkidu's vision of the underworld includes Sumuqan as well as Eanna and Ereshkigal. Possibly the connection of Sakkan Sumuqan with the underworld is due in some way to the association of the underworld with the desert in Babylonian thought.

Sakkan was thought of as a son of the sun god Samas (Utu). In his rôle as a protector of wild animals he was sometimes envisaged as a shepherd. He was also responsible for the fertility of wild creatures.

## Sala

The goddess Sala (or Salis, which is probably a Hittite form of her name) was not a goddess of native Mesopotamian origin. She is likely to have been a goddess of the Hurrians originally, and she entered the Mesopotamian world either as the wife of Adad (Iškur) or, in a con-



147 (right) The goddess Sala, holding a barley stalk, drawn on a clay tablet with an astronomical text, found at Uruk (modern Warka) and dating to the Seleucid Period.

trasting tradition, as the wife of Dagan. In incantations to the fire god Girta (Gibil), for use in magical rituals intended to undo sorcery (see magic and sorcery), Girta is said to be the son of Sala.

A symbol of Sala was a barley stalk, suggesting that she was perhaps an agricutural deity. One text links Sala and an ear of grain with the constellation called the Furrow (Virgo), whose brightest star, in modern terminology, is Spica (Latin *virgo*, 'maiden'; and *spica*, 'ear of grain').

See nude woman; zodiac.

Samas: see Uta.

## Sara

The god Sara was the local god of the Sumerian city of Umma, where he was worshipped in the temple E-mah. A fragment of a stone bowl dedicated to Sara was found in a rubbish dump in the Early Dynastic temple at the site in north-eastern Babylonia called today Tell Agrab, and may indicate that this town (whose ancient name is unknown) was once a cult centre of Sara.

The epithet 'hero of An' suggests that Sara was a warrior god, as was the fact that in the Babylonian myth of Anzu (Imdugud), Sara is one of the gods asked to undertake the fight against Anzu (eventually taken on by Ninurta). In the Sumerian poem of Inana's descent to the underworld, Sara is one of three deities who come to pay homage to Inana after her return: this may be connected with a tradition preserved in the myth of Lugalbanda and a building inscription of the Third Dynasty of Ur that Sara was the son of Inana.

Sar: see Ianna.

## Serida (Aya)

Serida (Akkadian Aya) is a goddess of light, regarded as the consort of Utu-Samas, the sun god. She is associated with sexual love and fruitfulness. The name Aya is found in personal names from the Third Dynasty of Ur. She was particularly popular during the Old

Babylonian Period, and again during the Neo-Babylonian Period. Aya was worshipped together with Samas at Sippar and Larsa.

See Sacred Marriage

Sulal: see Iškur

## Sul-pa-e

The cult of the Sumerian god Sul-pa-e (*sul-pa-e*, 'brilliant youth') is attested from the Early Dynastic Period on. Despite his name, he was not a youthful god but was, according to one tradition, the husband of the 'mother goddess' Ninhursag (see mother goddesses and birth goddesses), who bore him three children (Agi, Lian and Lil). The tradition is at odds with the Sumerian myth in which it is Enki who is the consort of Ninhursag. Sul-pa-e remained a minor god, whose character is not certain. In one Sumerian poem offerings are made to Sul-pa-e in the underworld, and in later tradition he was included among the demons. Astronomically, Sul-pa-e was one of many names of the planet Jupiter.

## tablet of destinies

The tablet of destinies, along with the me and the enlil and throned, was one of the objects whose possession guaranteed Enlil his supreme position as ruler of the universe and controller of the affairs of men and gods. It was envisaged as a tablet of cuneiform writing, impressed also with cylinder seals, in other words as an unalterable legal document or authorised treaty. The god is described as 'holding it in his hand' or 'clutching it to his breast'. The tablet invested its holder with the power to determine the destinies of the world, and not for nothing was it described as a cosmic bond linking heaven and the underworld.

In the Sumerian poem 'Ninurta and the Turtle', it is Enki who holds the tablet. Both this and the Akkadian Anzu poems concern the theft of the tablet by the bird Anzu (Imdugud). In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, it is Tiamat who gives the tablet to Qingu.

taboos

The term *taboo*, meaning set apart or consecrated to a god and hence forbidden to general use, is used as an approximate translation of Sumerian *in-gig*, Akkadian *ikkibu*, *asag* (Akkadian *asakku*) has a similar meaning.

The sense of this idea is that of a thing, place or action forbidden to the general public because it is sacred to a particular god; or a thing, place or position, or activity reserved for a god or king. For instance, one should not eat a certain meat, fish or vegetable on a particular day of the month because it is the *ikkibu* of a particular god, e.g. eating game might be an *ikkibu* of the god Sumuqan (Sukhan). Similarly one should not mention certain subjects or perform certain actions on a particular occasion or during a particular ritual, for the same reasons. The name of the god concerned is always specified. A certain place might be an *ikkibu* of the king, and denied to everyone else.

The common usage, referring to any form of infringement, of the phrases 'to eat the *ikkibu*' and 'to take or steal the *asakku*' may give some idea of the original application of the concepts: likewise 'to step on the *asakku*' (a synonymous word). Later these words did become little more than synonyms for 'sin'.

See magic and sorcery; purification.

talismans: see amulets.

Tammuz: see Dumuzi.

Tasmétu: see Nabû.

temple prostitution: see prostitution and ritual sex.

temples and temple architecture

Mesopotamians might worship in open-air sanctuaries, private chapels in domestic houses or small separate chapels in the residential quarters of town. The heart of religious life, however, was the temple.

As the words for a temple in Mesopotamian languages suggest, the temple was nothing more or less than the god's personal abode on

earth (Sumerian *e*, Akkadian *bītu*, 'house'), and the deity normally 'lived' in his or her temple in the form of a cult statue standing in the main shrine. In the historic periods, at least, the temples of the various gods had their own names, such as the E-kur ('Mountain House') of Enlil at Nippur or the E-abzu ('Abzu House') of Enki at Eridu (similarly E-ana, E-sagil, E-zida).

According to Sumerian tradition, Eridu was the oldest city of southern Mesopotamia. There archaeologists have unearthed a sequence of mud-brick temples repeatedly rebuilt during the late fifth and early fourth millennia BC. The earliest is only a small shrine, about three metres square. Yet this structure already shows important elements which continued in the temple form of later times: an altar in a niche set opposite the doorway and a small offering table in front of it. In later periods the plan was elaborated but retained its essentials. The shrine was lengthened and numbers of rooms added on either side.

As each successive rebuilding of the Eridu temple was constructed upon the ruins of its predecessor, it eventually came to stand upon its own mound, making an impressive image on the skyline and towering above the surrounding buildings. According to one theory, this development gave rise to the construction of ziggurats, or temple towers. The external appearance of the temple was also improved by series of alternating buttresses and recesses, possibly in imitation of the vertical reed bundles that supported the walls in reed houses. In later periods this form of buttressed façade became the most characteristic feature of Mesopotamian temple building, and was also copied in temple construction in Egypt.

By early historic times (late fourth millennium BC) we can see some greater diversity in adaptations of the basic temple plan. In the E-ana precinct at Uruk some half dozen temples, though no longer built at any great height, preserve the earlier arrangement with a main sanctuary, lateral rooms and an axially placed altar. The sanctuary is now occasionally of cruciform design, as also is that of the con-

temporary temple at Tell Brak in northern Syria (see eye and eye-idols). In all other respects the plan continues that of the prehistoric temples. However, some temples, such as the so-called White Temple at Uruk, continued to be built on raised ground. Although again simply the ruins of earlier buildings, the platform was now faced with sloping brick panels, similar to ziggurat construction. The walls of the temple itself were again heavily buttressed, with evidence of original wooden decoration within the alcoves. In such temples the long sanctuary and side-rooms remain, with entry for the worshippers through one of the side-rooms. At either end of the sanctuary, however, are also major doorways, so that the shrine stands as a kind of portal. So that it does not intrude upon this thoroughfare, the altar is displaced from its axial position.

Some archaeologists have postulated a division of these temples by function. In ground-level or 'low' temples the deity normally resided and received worship, as represented by a cult statue. In contrast, 'high' or platform temples are thought to have been used as a place by a god on his visits to earth.

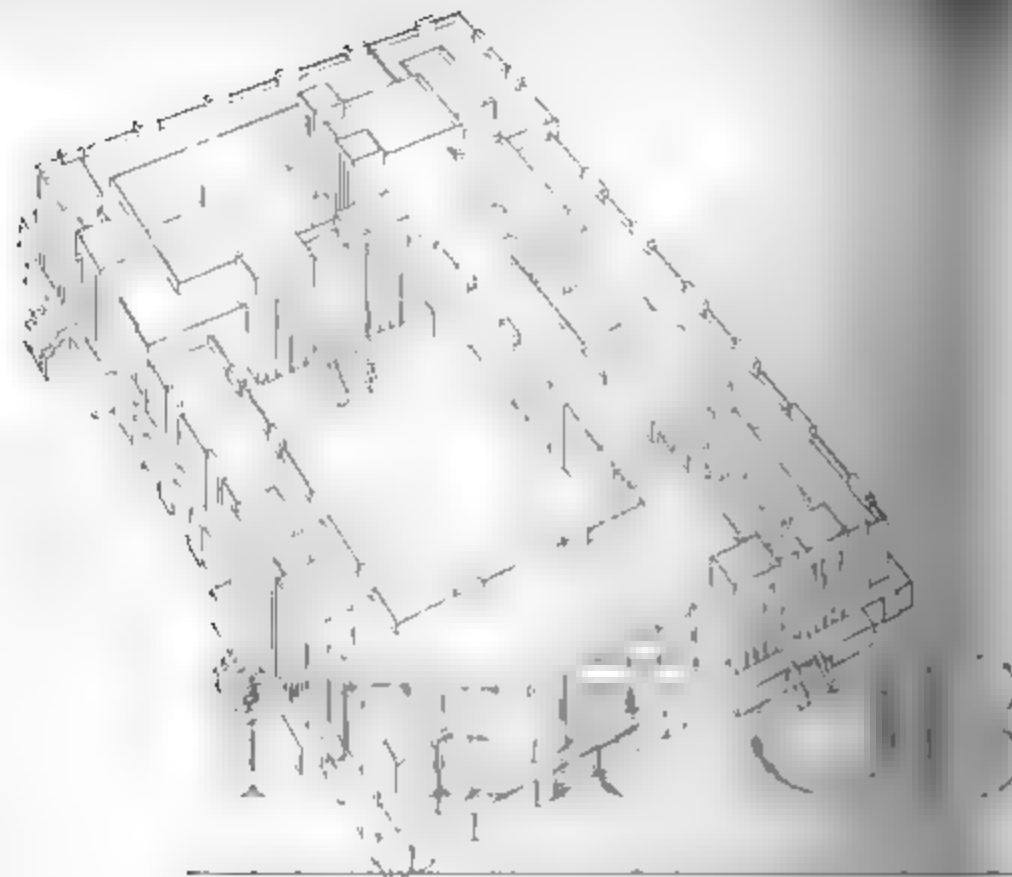
Representations of temples are shown on early historic seals before we ever have the depiction of any god. The temple is characterised by its rectangular shape. Its elements as a temple is shown in the frequent association of processions of men approaching the building carrying offerings of various kinds. Buildings of this type may also be shown flanked by divine emblems, usually the ring-post or ring-staff (although both of these can also be seen on cylinders, presumably as divine protection for the animals). Similar rectangular buildings are shown on seal designs which associate them with groups of quadrupeds, usually goats. It has been suggested that we have here represented a different kind of temple, a rural shrine constructed not of brick but of timber poles and reed matting.

From the Early Dynastic Period we have the remains of two 'high' temples, or rather of the temple platforms only, since in neither case has the building itself survived. One is at Tutub

(modern Khafajah), the other at al-'Ubad (modern Khafajah), the other at al-'Ubad close to Ur. In both cases the platform is surrounded by an oval-shaped outer wall, enclosing a sacred area with certain smaller buildings. The temple platform at al-'Ubad was faced with baked brick walls, approach to the temple being by a projecting stone stairway. In the angle between the two was found a cache of objects which provide unique information about the external decoration of an Early Dynastic temple. Early Dynastic temples of the 'low' type are perhaps best represented at sites excavated in the Diyala River valley. They all retain the same basic arrangements as the early historic 'low' temples, and all, in fact, were founded at that earlier time. There are, however, some elaborations, creating a kind of temple complex. The temple of Sin (Nanna-Suen) at Tutub acquired a forecourt with surrounding dependent buildings, while the temple at Tell Agrib became a complicated unit comprising a number of sanctuaries in addition to the principal shrine.

Little is known of any type of architecture in the Akkadian Period, and the site of the capital city Agade is unknown. It seems, however, that in this period the Sumerian temples continued in use and were restored.

Much of the religious architecture of the subsequent Third Dynasty of Ur is little understood. From the central precinct at Ur have been recovered the ground-plans of two large square buildings, each of which seems to be a combined temple and palace. From the same period comes a great mausoleum of the Third Dynasty kings and associated mortuary chapels. At Eannunna (modern Tell Asmar), excavations have unearthed an interesting building complex combining a temple of the deified Su-Suen, king of Ur, and the ruler's residence (see deification of kings). The temple is constructed on a central axis, leading from a main gateway flanked by towers through a central courtyard to the sanctuary itself, its niche equipped with altar and cult statue. Since the temple had been dedicated to a god-king of Ur, after the fall of Ur it was incorporated into the palace.



148 A reconstruction, based on the University of Chicago excavations, of the temple of the local goddess Istar-Kishum at Nerebrum (modern Ishchali) in the city-state of Eannuna. The building measured approximately 100 x 60 m. Isin-Larsa Period.

area and associated buildings. One of these temples, dedicated to Istar herself, was built at a higher level, with a large treasury behind it. Each of the gateways to the temple was guarded by a pair of towers.

For the most part the religious architecture of the Kassites seems to have followed the existing Sumerian style. A high ziggurat with associated temples was built at the new capital Dür-Kurigalzu (modern 'Aqar Quf near Baghdad). A temple at Uruk, however, introduces a new feature: relief figures modelled in the brickwork of the façades. Probably the figures were magically protective.

At official level, the Assyrians perhaps placed a greater emphasis than hitherto upon secular architecture – in particular the palaces of the Assyrian kings. However, heavy programmes of state religious building also flourished. The Middle Assyrian temple of Istar at Assur was built on the foundations of an earlier Sumerian temple of Inanna, originally a single shrine like the temples of the south. By the thirteenth century BC, side chambers and a subsidiary shrine at the corner had been added. A purely Assyrian element was the separation of the goddesses' sanctuary from the area of worship, with the altar placed in a niche at the top of a wide stairway. Representations on seals show that the corner and gateway towers of Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian temples were built to a greater height than the rest of the building, and were provided with windows. The façades were decorated with series of often elaborately decorated columns, probably a development from the buttressed façades of Sumerian temples, and the tops of the walls and towers had crenellated parapets. The remains of vaulted roofs have been found in some temples. The interiors of the temples were earlier decorated with painted panels and glazed bricks, later in the monumental stone revetment.

See below: building sites and deposits.  
Istar

Picture see Tishpak.

three see numbers.

### Tiamat

In the unique version of the creation of the gods preserved in the Babylonian Epic of Creation, after the separation of heaven and earth the only entities in existence were Apsû (see above) and Tiamat. Apsû personified the fresh subterranean waters and Tiamat the salt waters, the name is a form of the word *tiannu*, 'sea'. Apsû and Tiamat were envisaged as a male-female pair, although it is said that 'their waters mingled together'. They engendered a line of gods including Anu (An), Anu's son Ea (Enki) and (apparently) other deities, whose

activities so disturbed Apsû that he planned to exterminate them (despite Tiamat's protests). When Ea slew Apsû, Tiamat determined to be avenged and created eleven monsters (see Tiamat's creatures) with, as her champion, the god Qingu, described as her 'lover'. Eventually, after a heroic contest, Marduk, champion of the younger gods (in the Assyrian version his name is substituted with that of Assur), defeated the monsters and Qingu and destroyed Tiamat by splitting her skull with his mace, while standing on her 'lower parts'. He broke her in two 'like a dried fish', using one half to roof the heavens and the other to surface the earth: her breasts formed mountains, 'Tigris and Euphrates flowed from her eyes, her spittle formed clouds. While in some respects Tiamat, like other deities, is described in anthropomorphic terms, it is difficult to form a precise picture of how the author of the Epic envisaged her. In other passages it seems to be implied that the salt sea waters were inside her.

### Tiamat's creatures

In the Babylonian Epic of Creation, in order to avenge herself on the younger gods, Tiamat gives birth to eleven monsters, or groups of monsters (bearing some resemblance to the Slain Heroes defeated by Ningirsu or Ninurta in a story of earlier origin). The eleven are the *mušmuḫḫu*, *utunḡollu* and *bašmu* (three types of horned snake), the *mušḫušḫu* (a snake-dragon), the *laḫmu* (possibly identical to Lahmu, the long-haired 'hero' figure), the *uḡallu* ('great storm-beast', the lion-demon), the *urdimmu* ('raging lion', the lion-humanoid), the *girrablūlū* ('scorpion-man', see scorpion-people), *ūmu dabrātu* ('fierce storm'), *kalūlū* ('fish-man'; see merman and mermaid), and *kurarikkū* (a mythical beast probably derived from the bison, see bull-man). All of these are defeated by Marduk (in the Assyrian edition, Assur) in a great battle. Images of them were placed by Marduk in the *apsu* (abzu) as a monument to the victory.

The creatures of Tiamat were sometimes invoked in magical incantations (see magic and sorcery), and figurines of some of them were



149 'The Tower of Babel' by Pieter Breughel the Elder, painted in 1563. The biblical story of Babylon's tower has provided a favourite theme for artists from the Middle Ages to the present day.

the southernmost extent of the area inhabited by the Hurrian people.

Tiġpak was a warrior god, as implied by his epithet 'Lord of Armies'. In a Babylonian myth, Tiġpak is instructed by Enlil (Nanna-Suen) to kill the monster Labbu. An ancient description of an artistic representation of the god has him carrying bow, arrows and mace.

The animal symbol of Tiġpak (see beasts of the gods) was probably the snake-dragon.

#### Tower of Babel

According to the Book of Genesis (11:1-9), the Babylonians wanted to build a mighty city and a tower 'with its top in the heavens'. The completion of the project was frustrated by Yahweh, who scrambled the speech of the workers to the point where they could no longer understand one another. The people were then dispersed throughout the world.

On one level the story seems to be a myth to explain the presence of diverse human lan-

guages. In an earlier Sumerian poem, Enki created all the languages from one original tongue. The biblical imagery, however, was probably inspired by the ziggurat or temple tower at Babylon, in Hebrew *Babel*. The metaphor of the tower for world language was suggested by a pun on Hebrew *balal* (to confuse): 'Therefore its name was called Babel, because the Lord confused the language of all the earth'.

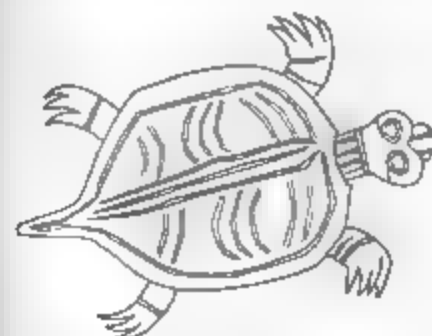
The ziggurat of Marduk at Babylon was known as E-temen-an-ki ('Foundation of heaven and earth'). It had a base 100 metres square, and reached 90 metres in height, in seven stages, the uppermost being a temple described as built in blue-glazed brick. After the partial demolition of the ziggurat in the Hellenistic Period and its subsequent decay, for many centuries visitors to Mesopotamia sought the location of the Tower of Babel at a variety of neighbouring sites.

'tree in life' see stylised tree and its 'rituals'

incident: see forth

turtle

In the Sumerian poem 'Ninurta and the Turtle', when Ninurta has recovered the tablet of destinies, the sea and the divine plants, which had been stolen from Enki by the bird Imdugud, he seems unwilling to return



150 A turtle as symbol of the water god Ea. One of the emblems carved on a *kudurru* of the Kassite Period.

them to their rightful owner. Enki accordingly makes a clay turtle which he brings to life. The turtle digs a hole in the ground and covers it over, and Ninurta falls into the hole. The turtle pays no attention to the hero shouting 'Let me get out!', and Enki rounds on Ninurta: 'What success did your strength bring you? Where is your heroism now?' Presumably the sea, the plants and the tablet of destinies were returned to Enki.

Represented in art from prehistoric times onwards, the turtle apparently first became associated with the god Ea (Enki) in the art of the Akkadian Period. On *kudurrus* it can stand as a symbol of Ea, as an alternative to the goat-fish with ram-headed staff (see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods). Sometimes the turtle itself is placed on the back of a goat-fish (instead of the staff). The device no doubt seemed appropriate for a god of the fresh-water *abzu*, and already had a mythological basis in the Sumerian Imdugud story.

uk-su-ukkinu: see assembly of the gods.  
Ekur.

udug (utukku)

*Udug* (Akkadian *utukku*) was a term for a particular type of demon, and like many such words it was originally neutral as regards the beneficial or harmful influence of the beings. Gudea, ruler of Lagash, asks a goddess for the protection of a 'good *udug*' and a 'good *lama*' to guide him. In a large collection of magical incantations intended for use against a wide range of malevolent demons, we read both of a specific 'evil *udug*' and in general terms of evil '*udugs*' (where the term seems to include other demons as well).

See Seven (demons).

Umušitum: see Anunitu.

umu dabruṭu

*Umu dabruṭu*, meaning in Babylonian 'violent storms', is the name of one, or of one of the species, of eleven monsters created by Tiamat in her conflict against the younger gods (see



Tiamat's creatures). It is not known in what physical form this particular species was imagined.

### underworld

What happens to people when they die? What is the nature of death? These eternal questions troubled the Mesopotamians as they have, and still do, all other peoples. Because of disease and man's lesser control over his environment in ancient times, the average lifespan may have been no more than thirty years, and those who did live into old age acquired experience and wisdom commanding great respect. Death is final, and there is no return from it. The dead 'bite the dust' in a very real sense when their bodies are covered with earth.

These observations found mythic expression in the idea that there is another 'world', where as the dead are together, in the ground (beneath the surface of the earth), where they continue to live some residual form of life altogether inferior to life on this earth. The Sumerians had quite a number of differing names for this other world: *anah, irkalla, kukkur, ebur, kigal, gurgub*, all of which were borrowed into Akkadian as well. (Otherwise it was known simply as the 'earth' or 'ground' (Sumerian *er*, *gur*, Akkadian *eretu*), the 'land of no return' or, occasionally, the 'desert' or else the 'lower world'. This last name makes clear the location of this underworld, and from various sources we learn that there was a stairway down to its gate (for which the name *ganer* was used); that it was possible to open up a hole in the ground which would give access to the underworld, and that the underworld was situated even lower than the *abzu*, the fresh-water ocean beneath the earth. The last point is clearly an attempt to reconcile two conflicting cosmological ideas, and it is interesting that there are traces of other beliefs about the location of the 'underworld'. The name 'desert' sometimes used to refer to it, and the designation of the river of the underworld by the names of actual rivers distant from Sumer, perhaps suggest a rival belief that the world of the dead was located in a remote and inaccessible area of the earth's surface, perhaps far in

the west. Although the word *kur* referring to the underworld means 'earth' there seems also to have been some confusion with *kur* meaning 'mountain(s)', and hence possibly another trace of this belief.

The underworld is always described as in complete darkness, dusty and unpleasant. All the dead, without exception, wander there, thirsting for water and having only dust to eat. Sometimes they are described as naked, or clothed with feathered wings like birds. Apart from these spirits of the dead (*gidim*), the underworld is also the home of the dead gods, of some demons (who are described as the 'offspring of *anah*' and who came from the underworld to bring tribulation to mankind), and of a number of deities, principally Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld, and her husband Nergal. In the Mesopotamian conception, unlike that of the Egyptians, there was no judgement or evaluation of the moral qualities of the dead. They stood before Ereshkigal, who merely pronounced the sentence of death upon them while their names were recorded on a tablet by Geshurana, scribe of the underworld, as if they were labourers turning up for work. The god Ningizzida functioned as major deity of Ereshkigal's household, Pabilsag as her administrator, Namtar her minister or messenger, and Neti was the gatekeeper. The god Enmesarra and other gods are at times associated with the underworld, and in later Babylonian texts 600 Anunnakû (Anuna) gods are assigned to the underworld. This reflects the development of a more precise picture of the nether regions.

A number of literary works from one and a half millennia reflect imaginatively the changing conceptions of the underworld. The Sumerian poem 'Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World' (a version of part of which was incorporated into the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh) describes a conversation between Gilgamesh and the ghost of his dead servant Enkidu which makes it clear that while life in the underworld is most unattractive, it can be made slightly more tolerable if surviving relatives make regular offerings to the dead of food

and drink, so that it is desirable to leave as many descendants as possible. Those who have no children have a hard time indeed after death, while those who do not even receive proper burial are worst off: the person who died in a fire or whose body lies in the desert does not even have a *gidim* in the underworld.

The Sumerian poem 'The Descent of Inanna to the Underworld' (also preserved in an Akkadian version, 'Ishtar's Descent') and the myth 'Enlil and Ninlil' both deal with the excep-

tional circumstances of gods who overcome the laws of nature by making a visit to the underworld from which they succeed in returning. In both cases this is only achieved by the provision of a substitute who takes their place or is left behind in the underworld so that they may return.

The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh includes an account of a dream dreamed by Enkidu before his death (separate from his description of the underworld after his death), in which

151 A Neo-Babylonian cast copper or bronze plaque, apparently used as a magical protection against evil demons. Originally it probably hung off a wooden frame fastened over the top of the bed. The uppermost register shows emblems of the main gods, thereby probably invoking the protection of the deities symbolised. Next, a row of seven animal-headed beings, probably also magical protectors. The third register shows a sick man lying in bed and flanked by fish-garbed figures (perhaps priests), accompanied by supernatural protective beings. Below, the evil goddess Lamastu returns along the river of the underworld to her infernal home, driven on by Pazuzu and tempted by various offerings. Ht. of plaque 133 mm.





those who were kings in life are reduced to the same ghastly state as all the other dead. This emphasis on the levelling aspect of existence in the underworld is not usual. The retelling of this dream has an appropriate dramatic effect on Gilgames.

An unusual Neo-Assyrian poem describes a vision of the underworld experienced by a prince named Kummaya, in which the prince is nearly prevented from returning to the world of the living by Nergal, who berates him for having the temerity to enter his wife's domains. The god Išum intercedes on his behalf and he is allowed to return – in fact to wake up, since the grim vision turns out to have been a dream. It is very detailed, but perhaps idiosyncratic. The prince has been thought to be Assurbanipal, later king of Assyria (ruled 668–c.627 BC.)

See afterlife, death and funerary practices, galla, kur, Lugal-irra and Mešlamta-ea, night, Ninazu, Nungal, river of the underworld, Šakkan, Šul-pa-e

#### Uruian gods

The state of Van, better known by the name Urartu, applied to it by the Assyrians (and appearing in the Bible in the form Ararat), lay to the mountainous area around and to the south of Lake Van in what is now south-east Turkey and the neighbouring areas of north-west Iran and Armenia. The oldest definite evidence for the kingdom is from the third quarter of the ninth century BC. Urartu, which rose to become a powerful influence in the international politics of its day and a thorn in the flesh of Assyrian kings, was finally overthrown by the Scythians and absorbed into the Median, then into the Persian empire. The people of Urartu spoke a late form of the Hurrian language and preserved some aspects of Hurrian culture. Among their deities were

Haldi, the national god of Urartu,

Bagbarti, the wife of Haldi,

Tešeba, a storm god (corresponding to Hurrian Tešub);

Šiwini, a sun god (corresponding to Hurrian Šimigi).

Selardi, a moon god.

#### Uraš (god)

The god Uraš was the local deity of the northern Babylonian city of Dilbat. He is mentioned in connection with the city in the Prologue to the Laws of Hammurabi of Babylon. In one tradition, he was regarded as an ancestor of An. In later periods he was even identified with An, or with Ninurta. He was among the gods worshipped in the city of Aššur. The Uraš Gate at Babylon was named probably from the direction of Dilbat, to the south of Babylon.

#### Uraš (goddess)

Uraš is the name of a goddess who in some traditions is the wife of An. In ancient commentaries, the name Uraš is explained as meaning 'earth' and according to other traditions the wife of An is Ea ('earth' in Sumerian). Uraš was said to be the mother of the goddesses Ninkinnu and Ninkasi. It has been suggested that the element -u-ra in the name of the god Ninurta (here 'in-means lord') is the same as the word *u-ra*, but this cannot be definitely shown.

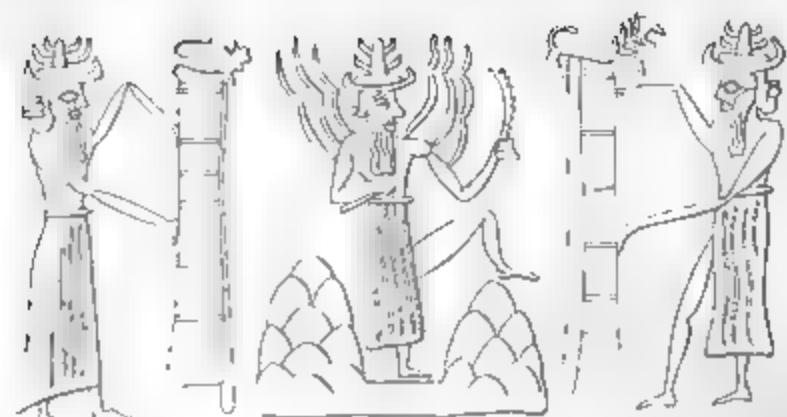
Uraš: see Ishnudi.

#### Utu

Utu was the name of the Sumerian goddess associated with weaving. Since the same sign is also used sometimes to write the word for 'spider', it is possible that she was envisaged in the form of a spider spinning a web.

#### Utu (Šamaš)

Utu was the Sumerian sun god, whose Akkadian name was Šamaš. He represents the brilliant light of the sun, which returns every day to illuminate the life of mankind, as well as giving beneficial warmth, which causes plants to grow. In the Sumerian tradition, Utu was the son of Nanna, the moon god, and twin brother of Inanna. In Akkadian traditions he



152 Aspects of Šamaš, from cylinder seals of the Akkadian Period. The god is shown as the rising sun, emerging through the open gates of the eastern mountains, at his court receiving worshippers, and as dispenser of divine justice. He is distinguished by the rays emanating from his shoulders and by his pruning-saw (*uššura*).

was sometimes made the son of Anu (An) or of Enlil. His wife was Šerida or (in Akkadian) Aya. The two principal temples of Utu, both called E-babbar ('White House') were at Sippar in Akkad, and Larsa in southern Sumer. In the Assyrian Period, there was a joint temple of Samas and Sin (Nanna-Suen) at Assur. The principal minister of Utu, his charioteer and, according to some traditions, his son, was the minor deity Huneš, worshipped from the Old Babylonian Period at Sippar and Uruk, and later at Assur.

The cult of Utu is attested from the earliest times. Described as bearded and 'long-armed', Utu emerged from the doors of heaven at dawn and made a daily journey across the skies to enter the 'interior of heaven' once again at dusk by the parallel set of doors on the western horizon. Cylinder seals show two gods opening the doors of heaven for Utu to come forth (see gatekeepers): the god brandishes his emblem the pruning-saw, typical of such saws still used in the Near East, with an arc-shaped blade and large, jagged teeth. In the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, the twin-peaked mountain Anšar is located near the eastern doors of heaven.

Presumably because the sun, in its path across the skies, sees everything, Utu Samas came to be regarded as a god of truth, justice and right. Samas, together with Adad (see Iškur), is invoked during Babylonian exorcism rituals. As a protector of right and destroyer of evil, he also had a warrior aspect to his personality.

A third aspect of Utu was his direct interest in the affairs of mankind. One of the early legendary kings of Uruk is described as a 'son of Utu' in the composition called the 'Sumerian King List', and Utu acted as a special protector of some of the later heroic kings of the city, for instance Gilgamesh. In the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, Samas helps the hero against the monstrous guardian of the Cedar Forest, Humbaba (Huwwa). In the Sumerian poem 'Dumuzi's Dream' Utu helps Dumuzi to escape from the galla-demons who have come to take him to the underworld. Babylonian Samas also acts as a just advisor in the legend of Etana, when the eagle, who has been

cruelly tricked into a pit by the serpent, implores the god's help. Samas brings along Lamma, who has been praying to Samas for the 'plant of giving birth' (see 'plant of life'), and Lamma and the eagle are able to assist each other; subsequently Lamma rides on the eagle's back to heaven.

A completely different rôle is assumed by Utu in a typically irreverent Sumerian poem when he tries to seduce his twin sister Inana by getting her drunk. The goddess of love responds by pretending complete ignorance of sexual intercourse or even kissing.

See Arabian gods, bull-man, cross, horned lion-humann, night, ring-staff, rod and ring, Sacred Marriage, solar disc, Šalmu, scorpion-people, winged disc.

utukku see udug.

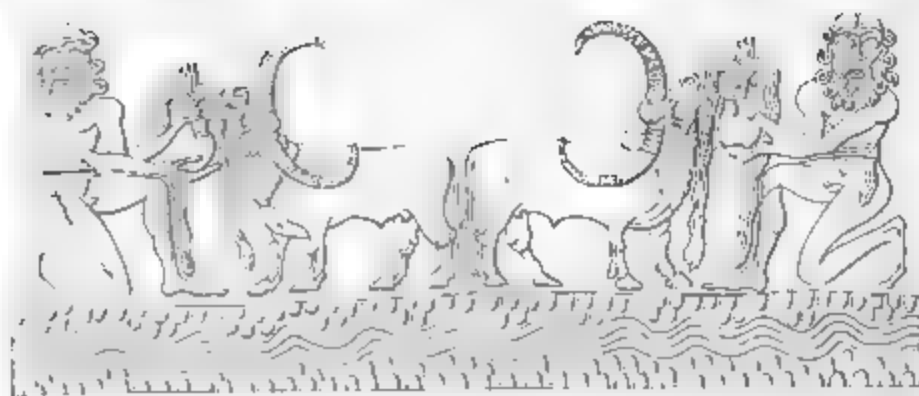
#### vase with streams

The device known as the 'flowing vase' or 'fertility vase' is a round-bodied, short-necked, three-lobed rim jar with streams issuing from its mouth. Sometimes fish are shown swimming along the streams, or replacing the streams but implying their presence. The vase can be held by figures of various kinds. It is a common element in art from early historic to Achaemenid times. The Akkadian name for the vase was apparently *šagullu*, 'abundance'.

In the Akkadian and Neo-Sumerian Periods, the vase is sometimes held by the water god Enki (Ea), but at this time, as in later periods, it is most often held by figures of Lahmu. Apparently the motif was associated with Ea and the creatures of the abzu, among whom Lahmu was sometimes to be counted. The vase was not, however, a divine symbol in the sense that it represented a particular deity, but was a general attribute of certain divine and semi-divine figures, perhaps signifying fertility and abundance.

Venus: see Inana.

visions: see dreams and visions.



153 Naked Lahmu gods hold vases with flowing streams, to which the water-buffalo come to drink. From the cylinder seal of Išbi-Errum, scribe to King Šar-kališari of Agade. Akkadian Period.

#### wedge

A wedge-shaped implement is depicted as a divine symbol or attribute in art from the Old Babylonian down to the Neo-Babylonian Period. It probably represents not so much the basic element of cuneiform writing as the actual stylus used to produce this script on leather-hard clay. In practice a reed was used, but gods' styli might be of gold or silver. On seals and sealings of the Old Babylonian Period, this wedge is held by a number of

apparently different male deities, including the water god Ea (Enki); a god who stands on a bull, so probably Adad (see Iškur); and a god who stands on a snake-dragon, probably Nabû. From Middle Babylonian and Middle Assyrian times we find the wedge not only as an attribute of the scribal god Nabû, but also as his independent symbol. It may be shown vertical or horizontal, single or double, sometimes next to (or replaced by) another piece of writing apparatus, which has been interpreted as a tablet or writing board. Sometimes, especially on Neo-Babylonian seals, the symbol is shown on the back of Nabû's snake-dragon, or the god, holding his wedge himself stands upon the dragon.

Some temple slaves were branded with the symbol of a wedge (see dedication).

wine: see alcohol; food and drink of the gods, libation.

#### winged disc

Both the origins and meaning of the winged solar disc are matters of controversy. Probably its ultimate origins were in Egypt, from where it passed via the Syrians and the Hittites to Mesopotamia. It first appears there in the glyptic art of the Mitannian kingdom, and was then transmitted to Assyrian and Babylonian art. Taken over by the Achaemenid Persians, it remained an important emblem in Iran until



154 A wedge-shaped stylus and tablet or writing board, symbolizing the scribal god Nabû. A common device among the symbols of the gods on Neo-Babylonian monuments.



155 Assurnasirpal II, king of Assyria (883-859 BC), rides into battle, firing at the enemy. From the sky he receives more than symbolic support from a god flying in a winged disc. Monumental stone relief from the royal palace at Kalhu (modern Nimrud). Ht. 0.93 m.

modern times. Often in Assyria, and normally in Achaemenid art, the figure of a god is shown above the central disc, in Assyria sometimes with the heads of two facing figures, perhaps scorpion-people, set at the ends of the wings.

The disc in Assyria was a symbol of Šamaš (Utu), though it has been attributed by some scholars to Aššur or Ninurta. The disc is often supported by supernatural creatures, such as a pair of bull-men, a pair of scorpion-men or a figure of Lahmu.

See Šalmu; stylised tree and its 'rituals'.

'winged gate': see bull and 'winged gate'.

#### witchcraft

Witchcraft, or sorcery, is the term used for the less attractive aspects of magic, which played a prominent part in everyday life in ancient Mesopotamia. Witchcraft was officially dis-

proved of because of its harmful effects and was punishable under the law, although its techniques were probably not very different from those of acceptable white magic. The practitioners of witchcraft seem to have been more often female than male. According to the laws of Hammurabi of Babylon (reigned 1848-1806 BC), a person accused of witchcraft had to submit to the river ordeal, and if proved guilty forfeited all property to the accuser. However, if they were proved innocent, the accuser was put to death.

See: magic and sorcery.

#### word

The idea of the power of a god's word as an instrument of creation is less common in Mesopotamia than, for instance, in the Hebrew literature of the Bible. However, just as kings command and things happen, so the Mesopotamian gods had only to utter for actuality to follow. The Sumerian *hymns* (long religious lyric poems) abound in meditations on the 'Word' of particular gods, dwelling as much on the terrifying and potentially destructive aspects of this attribute as on its beneficial, creative side: the Word of An or Enlil can

cause floods, destruction and diseases just as much as it can bring new life to the people.

In magical practice, it was extremely important to pronounce the words of an incantation clearly and exactly. Incantations are usually in Sumerian or Akkadian, occasionally in the Elamite language and only rarely are they complete mumbo jumbo, although some words of the 'abracadabra' type are used.

See magic and sorcery.

#### wrestlers

- Wrestling seems to have been a favourite sport among the Sumerians and Babylonians. Gilgamesh and Enkidu wrestle when they first meet: it has been suggested that the passage in the Old Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh describes what is called belt-wrestling, where each contestant grapples the other by the belt while trying to floor his opponent.

In some magical protective rituals, images or figurines of wrestlers were used. 'You make two bitumen figurines of wrestlers linked together and place them on the threshold'; 'You draw two wrestlers in whitewash on the gate; you place bitumen figurine of two wrestlers on the threshold, left and right.' Boxes as well as wrestlers are depicted in Babylonian art.

See magic and sorcery.

Nisrothma: see Zisura.

#### Zababa

Zababa was the local god of the important city of Kiš in northern Babylonia. His cult is attested already from the Early Dynastic Period. In the local tradition of Kiš, his wife was Inana/Ishtar, and the worship of Inana of Kiš was an important secondary cult of the goddess. The personality of Zababa appears to have been that of a god of war, and from the Old Babylonian Period he was identified with Ningirsu or Ninurta. In a list of gods he is described as the 'Marduk of battle'. The principal cult centre of Zababa was the temple E-mete-ur-sag at Kiš. An eagle-headed staff (see standards, staves and sceptres of the gods) was his symbol.

#### ziggurats

*Ziqqurratu* (usually anglicised as 'ziggurats') were pyramidal, stepped temple towers constructed at many of the cities of southern Mesopotamia from about 2200 until 550 BC, and imitated in the north by the Assyrians. They were built of solid brick, without internal rooms or spaces (save for drainage shafts). On the summit was constructed one or more shrines, usually to the principal god of the city, and sometimes including the bedchamber used for Sacred Marriage ceremonies. Access to the summit, when there is evidence, was by an exterior triple stairway or by spiral ramp. In



156 A wrestling bout depicted on a limestone plaque of the Early Dynastic Period, from the temple of the goddess Nintu at Turob (modern Khafajah). W. 240 mm.

other cases, if there was access at all, it may have been from the roof-tops of neighbouring buildings. Usually the structures were square or rectangular, averaging about 40 x 30 metres at base. No example is preserved to its full original height. The largest surviving ziggurat is at Al-Untas-Napirisa (modern Choga Zanbil), in Elam, built in the thirteenth century BC, 190 metres square and preserved to 24 metres high (which is estimated at slightly less than half its original height). Uniquely, access was via internal stairways.

The best-preserved example is that of the moon god Nannu at Ur. The lower part of the structure, built by Ur-Nammu, founder of the Third Dynasty, is substantially intact, and enough of the upper part survives for reliable reconstruction. The monument is 64 x 46 metres at base and originally about 12 metres in height with three storeys (increased to seven by Nabonidus in the sixth century BC). The corners are oriented in the cardinal points of the compass. The walls, sheer on three sides but relieved by shallow buttresses, curve slightly outwards from corner to corner and slope steadily inwards towards the summit, where the shrine stood. This was reached by a

great stairway on the northern side, dividing into three separate stairways, each of a hundred steps, from the level of the lowest terrace to the ground. Two of these stairways lean against the walls, while the third projects at right angles at the middle of the structure, focusing attention on the central axis, and so on the summit and shrine. The approach on all four sides was through a broad courtyard with gateways flanked by towers. The core of the ziggurat is sun-dried brick, faced with more than two metres of baked bricks set in bitumen.

The ziggurat at Ur shares some features with ziggurats in general, throughout the long history of their construction. Horizontal layers of reeds or reed matting were usually placed at intervals between the courses of brick, and external weep-holes and internal vertical shafts were intended to release moisture and rainwater.

The development of the ziggurat should probably be seen as an extension of the principles of 'high' temple construction (see temples and temple architecture). There is evidence for the existence of models of ziggurats. On seals the association of ziggurats with symbols of gods may suggest that such



158 A worshipper stands before a censer, an altar with offerings, a symbol and a (model?) ziggurat. From a cylinder seal of the Neo-Babylonian Period.

models were placed in shrines. In late Babylonian times it is likely that instead of, or in addition to, their original function as temple towers, the ziggurats were employed as astronomical observation posts (see astrology and astronomy).

#### See Tower of Babel.

#### Ziusura (Utnapishti)

Ziusura is the hero of the story of the Flood in a Sumerian version probably dating from the late Old Babylonian Period. The gods decide to send a flood 'to destroy the seed of the human race'. A certain god takes pity on mankind and instructs the king of Suruppak, Ziusura, to build a great boat, in which he is able to survive the waters. After his salvation, he makes an offering of thanks and eventually receives an 'eternal inspiration', going to live in the country of Dilmun.

A version in Akkadian of the Flood Story, incorporating the creation of mankind, may be of slightly earlier date; part of a later Standard Babylonian version also survives. In these, the protagonist is called Atra-hasis, 'the very wise'. The best known account of the Flood, however, is that incorporated into the Standard Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. In search of immortality, Gilgamesh journeys to visit one Utnapishti (probably *Utnapishtim*, 'He found life'), remembering that this man had received

eternal life after surviving the Flood. Utnapishti's story is then related. This time the initial setting is the city of Suruppak, and it is Ea (Enki) himself who instructs his protégé on the construction of a vessel, by which his family, together with artisans, animals and precious metals can be saved. After seven days of riding the storms, the ship runs aground on Mount Nimuš (probably in the Judi Dagh in south-east Turkey). After another seven days a pigeon, a swallow and a raven are sent out. The last finds a place to perch and so does not return, indicating that the waters are receding. The survivors then leave the ship and make sacrifices to heaven. Repenting the entire business, Enlil rewards Utnapishti for saving human and animal life by the grant of immortality: 'Until now Utnapishti has been only human, but from now on Utnapishti and his wife shall be like us gods.'

When Gilgamesh requests Utnapishti to show him the secret of immortality, the hero of the Flood challenges him to stay awake and conquer sleep. In this Gilgamesh fails: he can never be immortal. Utnapishti does tell Gilgamesh, however, of a plant that has rejuvenating properties for mortals. Gilgamesh acquires the plant but loses it to a passing snake, who eats it up, shedding its old skin for a new one (see 'plant of life').

The latest version of the story is one written in Greek in about 275 BC by Berossus, priest of Bel (Marduk) at Babylon. The hero is now called Xisouthros, clearly echoing the original Sumerian name. At the command of the god Kronos, Xisouthros saves his family, friends and the animals in a ship which he has constructed. When the Flood subsides, he releases birds in order to test the recession of the waves; the third group do not return. Xisouthros disembarks with his wife, daughter and pilot, who make sacrifices to the gods. They disappear. The rest of the company also disembark and proceed to Babylonia on foot, the vessel coming to rest on the Cordaeon mountains of Armenia.

The Biblical narrative of Noah and the Flood in Genesis shows many similarities to



157 The ziggurat tower at Ur, in present-day southern Iraq, partially reconstructed.

the story of Ziusura in the Mesopotamian tradition.

See Dilmun.

## zodiac

The association of certain constellations with the months of the year was first made by the Babylonians. By about 1000 BC they recognised eighteen zodiacal constellations (constellations through whose path the moon and planets appeared to move): the Hired Man (corresponding to our Aries), the Stars (the Pleiades, see seven dots; Seven (gods)), the Bull of Heaven (Taurus), the True Shepherd of Anu (An) (Orion), the Old Man (Perseus), the Crook (Auriga), the Great Twins (Gemini, see Lugal-irra and Meslamta-ea), the Crab (Cancer), the Lion (Leo), the Furrow (Virgo, see Šala), the Scales (Libra), the Scorpion (Scorpius), Pabilsaṣ (Sagittarius), the Goat-fish (Capricornus), the Great One

(Aquarius), the Tail, the Swallow and Anunitu (these last three forming together Pisces). Later the constellation the Field (Pegasus) was added.

By 600–500 BC these were systematised in such a way that they were distributed among the twelve months, singly or sometimes in pairs. For instance, the second month of the Babylonian year (corresponding to mid-April to mid-May) had both Taurus and the Pleiades; the third month Gemini and Orion; and the twelfth month Pisces and Pegasus. By about 400 BC the number of zodiacal constellations was reduced to the twelve that we are familiar with today, each covering 30° of the sky, and beginning with Aries for the first month (corresponding to mid-March to mid-April).

All these constellations are illustrated on astronomical tablets and on stamp-seals of the Hellenistic Period. Some of them may also be depicted on earlier kudurrus.

See astrology and astronomy.



159 Signs for constellations, including the Pleiades, Leo and Taurus, drawn on a clay tablet with an astronomical text, found at Uruk (modern Warka) and dating from the Seleucid Period.



## Recommended further reading in English

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